

# THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1886.

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## LADY VALERIA.

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### CHAPTER XVII.

#### HOW HESTER WAITED FOR NEWS.

EDRIC was not unmindful of his promise to let Hester Archdale hear the end—if end it were—of his adventures.

The *Royal Denbigh* being short of officers, and his chances of a visit to town uncertain, he had to content himself with writing, and in the course of the next and following days began a dozen letters at least. Despite his most strenuous endeavours, each of them broke down utterly in the course of a page or two and came to an untimely end in the waste-paper basket.

He made the discovery—by no means a novel one—that a faithful account of his experiences was not to be had for the mere writing down. For one thing, his impressions of his interview with Euphrosyne changed completely each time he recalled them. Sometimes the whole scene became so utterly meaningless and its conclusion so flat, that he decided it had been a fiasco from beginning to end. Euphrosyne and her confederates had taken him for somebody else, found out their blunder, and got rid of him—that was all. Again it seemed full of sinister meaning. He ought to write and warn Monk forthwith—against what? Then again it was a crazy freak of a superstitious woman. She was anxious to prove an alibi, for some reason of her own, his evidence came in useful, and it pleased her to make a melodramatic scene of it. There it was, clear as daylight. Sometimes the whole incident seemed pregnant with suggestions of tragedy, and he shrank from implicating Hester even by a confidence.

Perhaps he was unconsciously hampered by the recollection of Euphrosyne's last words—however much he persuaded himself he disregarded them. His account at last, not achieved till after many days, was a lame performance after all, only to be sent if he failed to see Hester. A week had passed before his chance came, and meanwhile, Hester waited and wondered, and Roswal and the young Buccleuch had rather a bad time of it—especially Roswal.

It was the sultry weather, Hester supposed, that made steady work impossible, and sent her off into languid fits of dreaming at critical moments, or else drove her into sticking doggedly at her easel long after both eyes and fingers had given signs of being past all good work for that day.

Master Jack expressed his sentiments after the manner of his kind ; grimaced, fidgetted, insisted on being bribed into goodness with unlimited chocolate creams ; presented his heels instead of his head for his sister's contemplation ; tried the sharpness of his little sword on the nearest chair-back ; made art experiments of his own with charcoal and turpentine ; and, in fact, generally conducted himself after the fashion of his elfish double, till dismissed in disgrace to the nursery.

Roswal knew all about it. He would pose "in act to spring" obediently enough ; but in a limp, uninterested fashion. "What's the use?" his great red eyes seemed to ask eloquently. "Why *should* I glare? If I did, instead of getting it down on canvas forthwith, you let the very slightest interruption—a postman's knock, or a stray step in the drawing-room—set your attention wandering for minutes together. Cats? No, I *don't* believe you!" It was treatment to make any dog flop down disgustedly, hang his great tongue out imbecilely and pant in exasperation.

"It's the weather, Cuss. I'm just as stupid as you to-day." It was a glaringly unjust comparison, but Cuss only blinked the more. "Such a good day too, old dog. Papa gone off with mother for the whole afternoon ; no one to interrupt us ; but," regretfully, "I *can't* paint, somehow. I'm getting nervous. Suppose we go round to Rose Damien's. She likes me to be there on a Monday ; and you shall lie in the conservatory and watch the gold fish ; and in the evening we'll have the horses out, and then, and *then*, old darling, you'll get your turn. Anything's better than waiting for people who don't mean to come, or who may just as easily be met at Rose's ; eh?"

Roswal came and sat up against her very hard for a moment to express approval, and then lumbered downstairs to the hall-door, so as to lose no time at the start.

There were a few hot days in that year's June, and this was one of them. The pavement scorched, the houses reflected heat, the sun beat through Hester's red parasol, the wind was a hot blast, the shadow a glow. Hester and Roswal both rejoiced when, the fiery transit over, they found themselves in shelter at St. Maur Road, listening in the hall to the murmur of voices above, that showed no falling off in the number of Mrs. Damien's Monday visitors. Hester decided on entering unannounced through the conservatory, and disposing of Roswal on the way. He had his own favourite nook under a stand of palms, where the tiles were cold and damp, and a lazy little fountain close by dripped musically into its moss-edged basin.

Hester's eyes, dazzled by the outer glare, at first wandered unrecognisingly from group to group in the cool, softly-lighted room, which

Mrs. Damien had arranged after her own ideas of comfort, and which looked strangely foreign and bare with its polished boards, filmy muslin draperies, and complete absence of heavy or needless ornament. All colour and brightness seemed concentrated in one spot, where Aunt Mamie stood presiding magnificently over a table piled with flowers, fruit and coloured sweetmeats till it looked like a giant nosegay; and dispensing the contents of a mighty silver bowl all dimmed with a chilly dew from the clinking blocks of ice that floated in a golden tinted mixture amongst slices of pineapple, spirals of lemons, and only Aunt Mamie knew what besides.

Aunt Mamie herself was a goodly sight. Her scarlet handkerchief was the brightest point of colour in the room; her white teeth flashed in delighted smiles; her great gold earrings swung and twinkled with each movement; her high cap and apron were so fresh, so frilled, so marvellously beyond all imaginable results of mere clear-starchery, that they might have been whipped to a froth out of sugar and snow and sent home by the confectioner.

"Nobody there!" said Hester, softly. "Nobody."

About a dozen people came under that description, and she proceeded to tell them over mentally. "The Lepells as usual—Mr. Lepell with his croud of girl worshippers. There are the Bostonians, those dreadfully cultured, pretty girls who know more about England than anyone over here can ever tell them, and have a theory ready made to account for everything. Lady Beatrix talking nonsense with her mouth full of strawberries, with all the men in the room admiring, except her husband. I wonder who that is bringing her an ice? I've seen him several times here lately, I think. Handsome, distinguished-looking and badly dressed. He *must* be a somebody to go about in a coat like *that*; besides, she looks so gratified at his attention. He's not listening to a word she says. He's looking right over her head at Rose. Who is Rose talking to? I wish someone would move and let me see. A lady—*Lady Monchalsea!*" Hester's little foot gave such a vicious little stamp that Roswal lifted his head with a jerk and looked all attention. "Wicked old woman! I thought she was dead! She shall see *I* am alive presently."

Mrs. Damien swaying gracefully in her big cane rocking-chair was waving idly her feather fan, and listening with absent eyes to the authoritative remarks of an imposing lady, who seated bolt upright, one foot on a stool, surveyed the company with a sort of magisterial air through a great gold eye-glass, all unconscious of being surveyed in her turn by the calm, handsome eyes of one of the fair Bostonians, evidently noting and storing up her peculiarities for future study—as a type. Lady Monchalsea had a thin, high-pitched nose and voice, and spoke in studied phrase.

"My dear," she was saying, "of course, in these days, thanks to Cook, every human creature has a chance of going everywhere. It is not *what* we see, but *how* we see it, that must be considered."

Mrs. Damien assented languidly; the fair Bostonian smiled approval.

"The tourist who infests the Alps may carry away some recollection of mere scenery, and enjoy his own vulgar holiday in his own vulgar way. But to stand face to face with nature in company with one capable of interpreting the higher beauty that appeals only to ——"

There was the stir of a fresh arrival. A tall young gentleman, with a close-cropped blonde head, was standing before Mrs. Damien. Hester's heart beat a trifle faster and then sank down fathoms deep, as he turned a rosy, vacuous, unknown face towards Lady Beatrix, while Lady Monchalsea, eye-glass and sentence held in suspension, frowned portentously on the interruption. Then the penetrating accents resumed.

"If it were an every-day travelling party that I were asking you to join, I could understand your hesitation. What I offer is no ordinary privilege—to visit the Alps in company with Professor Montrose."

"Professor Montrose?" Hester exclaimed to Roswal in astonishment.

And "Montrose" echoed in a low but enthusiastic whisper from the Boston group. "Montrose."

The handsome, odd-looking man turned from his chat with Lady Beatrix with much alacrity. "Did you call me, Mrs. Damien?"

"No. It was Lady Monchalsea who mentioned your name." And then, in response to the appeal of three pairs of lovely envious eyes, she proceeded to make the great man known to his transatlantic admirers, and provide him with three fresh followers on the spot. She seemed nervous and absent, only anxious to break away civilly from Lady Monchalsea.

Lady Beatrix, after a pout at the Professor's desertion, brightened up as three more masculine figures appeared on the scene. Hester disposed of these at a glance. Not one of them could have been mistaken for Edric for a moment. One dark—one short—one an old acquaintance. She watched each in his turn drift into Lady Beatrix's circle, and Lady Monchalsea seize her victim once more like the Ancient Mariner the wedding guest.

"You and I, Beatrix and Augustus Lepell, and Mr. Montrose—I know how much you will have in common with both the poet and the artist ——"

"Is that all your party?" interrupted Rose.

"We did expect Monchalsea and his wife, but Zillah is very delicate just now and keeps him prisoner beside her sofa. Perhaps Ted may get a holiday. I hope so. I am an old woman now and must have someone to see after my little comforts, and Ted knows the northern Tyrol better than any courier."

Hester started, and sallied forth in hot indignation. The arrangement was quite intelligible to her *now*. The Hon. Ted Boughton



was the last left on his mother's hands of a large, unlovely and unimprovable family, all the rest of whom had been adroitly disposed of in matrimony by their sagacious parent in half-a-dozen seasons. Lord Monchalsea, the eldest, most unlovely, and most unpromising, had offered himself to Mrs. Damien within a week of her arrival in England, to be refused and to carry his rejected title and affections to a wealthy daughter of the Tribes within another fortnight. A sufficient time had elapsed for Ted to be produced with decency; and so—and so——”

Mrs. Damien sprang forward to her as if welcoming the interruption. “Hester! I beg your pardon for not seeing you sooner. Have you been here long?”

“I have been in the conservatory putting Roswal by. He makes people hot to look at him this weather.”

“Just like Henderson,” laughed Mrs. Damien. “I daren’t put a butler into a white suit; and besides he is miserable without his tea-tray; so I’ve deposed him in favour of Aunt Mamie. Doesn’t she look delightful?” Hester detected a harassed air of preoccupation under Rose’s gay tone, and held her hand fast.

“I couldn’t help overhearing you,” she confessed, with a glance of supreme disfavour at her old antipathy, Lady Monchalsea, who was eyeing her superciliously. “Don’t you want to go? Why don’t you say so at once, and get rid of her?”

Rose looked at her with a gentle wistfulness. “I can’t decide. Perhaps it would be best to go—but the wisest decision is always the hardest. If I thought I should be missed here—ever so little—by anybody—I would stay, oh, so gladly.”

She broke off; the Bostonians were taking leave, going off with the Professor to see somebody’s pictures. There was a little outbreak of parting words. Hester heard “Zwiesel Alp,” “Königsee,” “Just too lovely,” “Pasterne Glacier!” &c. &c., to all of which Mrs. Damien listened, constrainedly smiling, with the distressed line between her brows that Hester alone could read.

“I’m a blind, selfish wretch,” she thought, with sudden illumination, as she watched the farewells. “She knows I hate the thoughts of her going back to those Monchalseas, and she is too shy to tell me what her real wishes are. Why has she never mentioned the Professor’s name to me? Perhaps they are old friends. I like his looks. I like the way his face lights up when he looks at her. I’m not afraid of that hulking, smoke-dried Ted Boughton. He and his mother may do their worst; Rose is safe from all danger from their attractions; but this man is of a different stamp.”

A whole romance unfolded itself in the girl’s busy brain before the shabby coat of the unconscious hero had finally disappeared through the doorway. She looked for Rose, anxious to show her comprehension, her sympathy. Mr. Lepell had dawdled up to their neighbourhood.

"You must come, Mrs. Damien. Beatrix will burn my sketch-book and throw my paint-box out of the window if I have nobody to support me. Now with you and Montrose ——"

Mrs. Damien turned away sharply, almost rudely.

"What do you think of the conservatory, Hester? Did you ever see the lilies so fine—though, of course, the best have gone to St. Fridolin's."

"The best of everything goes to St. Fridolin's, of course. My dear, that is just what all your friends are beginning to complain of," spoke Lady Monchalsea, unexpectedly, in a tone of iced spite.

Mrs. Damien flushed hotly, and gave her a haughty, defiant glance.

"Don't let St. Fridolin's keep you, Rose," eagerly interposed Hester. You know we can get someone to take your lectures. Miss Coutell is disengaged and would be only too glad to come. The parish could very well spare you for a few weeks. I cannot see why you should not go."

She spoke even more emphatically than was needful, keeping her eyes away from her friend's face till the last words, when she broke short off, startled at the miserable, half-imploring look in Mrs. Damien's lovely eyes. It vanished before she fairly caught it; and Rose was laughing a mocking, hard little laugh.

"There is independent testimony to the value of my exertions! Quite trustworthy too; so I may as well decide at once. When do you want me, Lady Monchalsea? The last week in June? Yes, that will suit me perfectly."

"Have I done wrong?" Hester asked herself anxiously; but she had no chance of even guessing, for the Lepells departed and were replaced by others, friends of Hester's, to whom Mrs. Damien abandoned them as others succeeded.

Aunt Mamie's bowl was running low before the room cleared again and Hester could approach her friend.

"Are you angry with what I said, Rose? Of course we all want you dreadfully. It will be hateful without you, and no one can really take your place."

"Hush, dear. It is all right, and the question is settled." Then, as if to change the subject: "I am rather worried about my poor Birdie. Mr. de Cressy came early, and says she is very unhappy and longing to see me. That unlucky brother has actually enlisted, and the old man is furious. I know what she will have to bear, poor child. I promised to go to her this evening, but Lady Monchalsea is going to stay to dinner, so I must wait till to-morrow."

"I'll go!" cried Hester, springing to a sudden decision. "I've nothing to do here. I shall be better than nobody. At all events I can tell her why you didn't come. Do let me!"

"The City—this blazing day—and it's getting late," Mrs. Damien exclaimed. Then, seeing Hester was resolved: "You must drive. I

will order the brougham ; but I dread what Lady Archdale will say. She hardly likes your going with me in the mornings."

Hester took her wilful way, as she generally did, Roswal in attendance, much as he disliked carriage exercise. Shine was hotter, shade was stuffier, as they drove citywards ; air was less, smells were more. Hester drove straight to St. Fridolin's and made her way on foot to Lavender Row. It had more the look of a half-emptied dust-bin than ever. Elsie's flowers were the only sweet, and her windows the only clean things about the place. Behind the blank, black wall the engine's ceaseless thud and clash seemed to make life hotter to hear it. The front-door was on the latch, after the primitive fashion of Lavender Row, so Hester entered, and tapped gently on the low, crooked panelled door.

"Come in," said a gay little voice, stopping in a snatch of song. Elsie's little sewing machine stood on the table beside her, and she was making it spin along gaily by way of accompaniment. "Miss Archdale !" she cried, in surprise, while Hester stood in wonderment at the girl's changed looks. She wore the same little spotted black print gown with the close little white frill round her throat that Hester had always known her in, but a pretty pink colour tinted each pale cheek. Her great eyes were full of light and life, her pretty lips were curving with smiles. Even the invalid's listless attitude had gone, and she was sitting erect and busy, and rose alertly to receive her visitor.

"I have a message from Mrs. Damien," Hester began, somewhat awkwardly. Was this the forlorn, drooping creature she had hurried to console. "She could not come herself to you, and sent me to hear what has gone amiss—with your brother, I mean. We were all so sorry."

"Won't you sit down?" Elsie asked, offering a chair. "How very kind of you to come so far on this hot day. Indeed, I should not have thought of troubling you. May I make you a cup of tea? The kettle is boiling. I expect father home soon."

"No, thank you," said Hester, vaguely dissatisfied. It was the same gentle, courteous Elsie, but her manner had just the slightest touch of gay carelessness in it, almost the bright sauciness of assured good fortune, that was puzzling.

"What did you wish to know?" she said, quite respectfully.

"Why, we all thought you were in such distress about Sampson," she began.

"Did you," said Elsie, amusedly. "I suppose to a lady it does seem a very dreadful thing to enlist, but to us it is different, and Sampson is sure to get on. He is a good shot to begin with, and if his instructor likes he can do much for him ; and he is over twenty, so it won't count as boy's service." Elsie stopped ; Hester still more surprised at her fluent command of the subject.

"If Mr. Paramount is satisfied ——"

Elsie's face fell. "Indeed, Miss Archdale, he takes it to heart terribly; but if I can only get him to listen to what Mr. Poynter says I'm sure he must come round."

"Mr. Poynter! What do you know about him?" Hester tried to ask indifferently.

Elsie flushed hotly. "He was good enough to come and explain things to us—to me," she said. "He has been here to-day," in a low tone. "He is very kind, and will take an interest in Sammy."

"Oh, well, I am glad it is all so very satisfactory," said Hester, trying not to speak curtly and drily. "Good-bye, Elsie; Mrs. Damien will be pleased to hear of you. You are looking so well, too."

"I have kind friends who take care of me—Oh! the dog, the dog!"

"What is it, Roswal? Down, sir! down!" For Roswal had suddenly flung himself at the door, and was tearing furiously at the floor with a low, savage growl. He stopped at Hester's voice, but never moved his nose from the ground.

"Come here!" cried his mistress, imperatively. "I am so sorry he frightened you. I suppose it was a cat outside. Now quiet, will you. Good-bye."

She opened the door and passed out, but at one bound the dog was half-way up the low staircase, and before she could overtake him was growling and tearing frantically at a closed door on the landing above. Hester seized him by the collar and dragged him away, struggling rebelliously and screwing his head round, half-choked but still obstinate. She gave in and dropped him in despair at last, when his sense of what was due to a lady seemed suddenly restored and he sprawled downstairs again obediently beside her.

Once in the street, Hester felt ready to sit down and cry. Roswal's misconduct following on the rebuff she had received had quite unstrung her nerves. The noise had made her head ache, the hot drive with home at the end of it seemed unendurable to contemplate. Instinctively she crossed the crowded street, after a word to the coachman, and ascended a short flight of steps between two blocks of warehouses and so on through a crooked lane, under a covered alley and out into the open space in front of St. Fridolin's.

The church door yawned open, wide and dark. Here at least she should find quiet and solitude. Here she might rest, weep, pray as she listed; yet half unwillingly she crossed the churchyard, Roswal at her heels. Within was gloom and emptiness, and stillness so deep that even her soft footfall on the flagged aisle seemed to rouse irreverent echoes. She slipped into one of the seats, and sinking on her knees dropped her face on her arms with a sob of weariness. Roswal, after tentatively licking her elbow, the brim of her hat, and her boot-heel very delicately, decided that it was not a case for his ministrations and departed to make sure that the horse and carriage were not absconding in his absence. Finding that the coachman, who was well

used to "our lady's" ways, had driven round to his usual position, he returned satisfied to await his mistress's pleasure.

How long she knelt there Hester did not know. Another footfall on the flags aroused her, and lifting her head she saw the Vicar entering by the vestry door and looking thoughtfully around. She hoped he did not see her. There was always a certain unspoken antagonism between them, though either would strenuously have denied the fact and professed the highest regard for the other; so, still as a mouse she kept, her bright eyes regarding him sharply.

Possibly her mood, a most unusual one, rendered her more sympathetic than usual, for she noted for the first time the weary look in his eyes, the anxious lines of brow and lip; or, perhaps, fancying himself alone, he let slip aside for a moment the mask of grave impassiveness that shielded him from the outer world. However it was, instead of the dignified parish priest, calm and strong and self-contained, Hester seemed to see a sorrowful, trouble-laden man, with eyes full of a hopeless yearning, and lips set in pathetic resignation. She looked and wondered, and half rose, and then he saw her. He seemed to take her being there for granted, that was one comfort, Hester thought.

"You are early for Evensong, Miss Archdale. I thought I was late!"

"I didn't come for Service. I came to think and rest," she answered him rather brusquely.

"No better place." He didn't begin upon Church privileges, or lecture her on neglected opportunities, as Hester dimly feared. He only stood with his face slightly up-raised to the light, thoughtfully smiling.

"I've had a very bad day," Hester spoke out suddenly and unaccountably. "Everything wrong and wretched from the beginning. It wasn't my fault. That I maintain. I'm not going in for any dishonest self-abasement. I only want peace and quietness to think things out and see where the misfit lies."

"And have you succeeded?"

"No, not quite," she admitted. "I still feel injured and don't know who to blame."

Mr. Stannard looked courteously, kindly attentive, and she went on impulsively. "It is just this: I used to think I was a great deal to many people, and now I have been suddenly shown that I am of no use to anybody, and it hurts."

"I do not understand you."

"I have had to nurse mamma, and manage the house, since I was quite a little girl; and daddy used to consult me and call me his commanding officer, only in fun, but it was half-true; and, of course, I was an important person in my way. Mamma is well again and we are all happy about it, only, she seems to have taken up life just where she laid it down a dozen years ago. All the arrangements of the house are wrong and must be altered forthwith; I am only a little girl to be looked after and found fault with and ordered about all day long.



Daddy is wrapped up in her (so he ought to be), and never takes my part by word or look. Why, mamma won't even let a visitor be admitted if she is not at home to receive him, and begins to think I ought to go nowhere without her. I can't make myself twelve years old again."

"Don't try. Let Lady Archdale realise by degrees that you are a grown up, reasonable woman." She mistrusted his use of the second adjective, and hastened to strengthen her case.

"I had Rose to lean on at least, or so I thought till to-day, when I found how completely outside her life I am, how little needful I am to her. Oh, it hurts, it hurts!"

"Tell me," Mr. Stannard said, with a thrill of sympathy in his voice. "What has she done?"

"I am not jealous of her love," Hester protested, half crying. "I would give her up gladly to any man worthy of it; but I am perfectly justified in mistrusting and despising the Monchelsea set. And to leave us all for them!"

She dashed her tears away defiantly, and in reply to his questioning look told briefly the story of that afternoon, as she had read it. Professor Montrose's name came in with a certain hesitation, and his part in the programme was slurred over, in her anxiety not to betray her friend. But she had an uncomfortable sense that the Vicar was, somehow, mentally supplying the gaps in her narrative; and she hurried on to her vexation about her fruitless errand to Elsie, laughing at her own inconsistency in being vexed. Then she stopped.

"Now tell me the real story. This is all Prologue, is it not?" was the unexpected comment.

She flushed up to her honest brown eyes, that wavered and drooped for an instant, and then lifted themselves straightforwardly to the Vicar's face.

"No, those are my real troubles; the other is only imaginary."

"None the less a trouble."

"I have been consulted on a very delicate and important matter. I have been intensely interested, and kept in suspense for a week, waiting for further news which has never come. Not because there wasn't any, but because somebody didn't think it worth his while to come and tell me. I never asked to be confided in. Perhaps he has forgotten the circumstance. It's insulting to be thrown over this way." Hester winked a little wrathful tear back. "It's not baffled curiosity that makes me so angry, it's because I'm disappointed in somebody."

"Don't mistrust too readily, and don't condemn somebody unheard. That is all the advice I have to offer you. I see you are quite capable of saying to yourself all that there is to be said about your difficulties. My lips could give it no more authority. Besides, it's service time"—looking at his watch—"what has happened to old Totterdale? No bell!"

He and Hester hurried to the west porch, and flinging open the great baize doors solved the mystery.

The congregation, four in number, two old men, a girl, and a widow in rusty crape, stood in a respectful semi-circle around, while Roswal stretched across the doorway, jealously insisted that his mistress's privacy should be respected. His looks were quite sufficient, though a boy's cap between his paws, and a chewed bit of broomstick looked as though an example had been made of somebody.

Across the churchyard old Totterdale was seen approaching with a big bewildered policeman in tow, who looked as if the job were quite out of his line, while a hatless little boy gyrated wildly around.

Hester comprehended, explained, apologised, made Roswal give a paw to one of the old men, pacified old Totterdale, restored the cap with a shilling inside to the owner, and satisfied the policeman. She felt as if some of her troubles had melted in the telling, and tripped back to her carriage with a lighter heart. Once there and alone with Roswal, the cloud descended again even more blackly. Cuss knew it, and laid a heavy paw in her lap, with wistful eyes fixed on her face.

"Did you believe her, Cuss? Do you think it likely that he would go to her, and forget about you and me, old dog?"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A DEAD FLOWER.

MAKING his way to the orderly-room on the morning of that self-same day, Edric had become aware of a young fellow advancing towards him with a comically conscious air that made him vaguely wonder who he was, and stop to look at him as he saluted. The lad stopped, too, as though rather expecting to be spoken to.

Another time Edric might not have bestowed a second glance on him. But just then his mind happened to be running on the events of that night week—Mrs. Damien's guests—Hester and Sir John—Elsie Paramount, with her wistful eyes and timid little question—"I want to know—how to get into the army"—and he laughed kindly to himself at the recollection.

It was the brother himself—the performer in the Septett—who stood before him, he realised suddenly, with a faint touch of consternation.

"Why—are you young Paramount?"

"Yes, sir," severely repressing his delight at being recognised.

"And what are you doing here?"

"Just been to the Colonel, sir. I came down on Saturday night."

"What? You've enlisted? What made you do such a thing?" Edric demanded, discouragingly.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but it's what I feel most fit for."

"Well, you know best yourself. I've heard you haven't done much good in any other line."

Sampson shifted his feet uneasily, and his mouth, curiously

sensitive and like his sister's, twitched a little. "I haven't done much good to myself, or been a credit to anybody, I know, sir. I hope it won't tell against me. I want to make a fresh start here. It was the work drove me wrong; indeed it was. After sitting screwed to a desk all day I used to feel crazy when I got loose again, and didn't know what I was doing. My head isn't strong enough for figures, sir."

Edric laughed a little, looked at the alert, soldier-like bearing of the boy, his open face, and eyes that looked wistful like Elsie's sometimes. He wondered how far his promise to Elsie committed him, and whether the young fellow knew of it.

"What do your people at home say to this?"

Sampson's face fell. "I haven't asked them. I just left a letter to say what I was going to do. Saturday was my last day at the office, so I came down here by the afternoon train. I didn't know then that I shouldn't be allowed to go back to explain. I think, perhaps, if my father had it out with me his mind would be more satisfied. Shall I *ever* be let away again, sir?"

Edric felt more relieved now he found that he had done nothing to bring about the catastrophe. "I can't say, but you'll find you are anything but a free agent now. Tied tighter than you ever were to the office."

"May be, sir. But I shan't have to think."

"Certainly not. That's done for you." And Edric, marvelling at the way in which a profession and a man seem to fit now and then, went on his way.

He rather wondered how he could best fulfil Elsie's timid little request. He hoped she had not taken his half-jesting words for more than they were worth—little shy, confiding thing. He could keep an eye on the youngster and see how he got on, but he couldn't think of anything else. Perhaps he ought to go and see the father and try to make Sampson's peace with him? Yes, he certainly ought to do that. Not from motives of pure philanthropy by any means. He had a very distinct vision of Mrs. Damien smiling on him ever so graciously and thanking him for the kind interest he was showing in her protégé. He would get the Paramounts' address and start off to town at once. First to the old father; then to the Archdales—he felt somehow as if that interview with Hester would clear his mind marvellously. Last and late, so as to avoid the ugly rush of callers, to St. Maur Road.

So he plotted and planned on his townward way; and prospered—as such self-seeking deserved.

As he drew near Lavender Row a misgiving seized him as to the propriety of his interference. He had a dim notion that a clergyman was the proper mediator in a family difficulty—especially when that family was a churchwarden's. He would make for St. Fridolin's and consult the Vicar, he thought; and then, just as luck would have it, he came full upon de Cressy.

"I'll go with you and show you the way," he said, when the case was put to him, "but I think you'd better tell the story yourself. My good word wouldn't do much for your recruit with his father, I'm sorry to say. There's the house, and there's Mr. Paramount just going in."

The little old gentleman, umbrella in hand and a huge roll of papers under his arm, turned and faced Edric in the narrow passage.

Edric introduced himself, for de Cressy had fled. "I have a message to give you from your son, Mr. Paramount."

"Then I must beg of you *not* to deliver it," was the disconcerting reply. "I have no desire to hear more of him."

Edric was almost tempted to give up the point and retreat discomfited, but Mr. Paramount flung open the parlour door hospitably wide, and he caught a glimpse of Elsie crouching in her window-seat, her pretty eyes opened to their widest with startled delight, her hand pressed on her heart, which had given one great beat, and then stood still with delicious incredulity at the sound of the voice outside.

He could but enter and make a second attempt in Sampson's behalf, addressing himself to her this time, as her father with ostentatious indifference began to unfasten his papers and turn them over. Still, he *was* listening, Edric thought, so he delivered himself of a little explanatory speech, making out the best case he could for Sampson, while Elsie blushed, and murmured her thanks, and lifted her eyes in shy, grateful glances.

Mr. Paramount fidgeted about, sorting, selecting, and finally rolling up his papers again. Then, when Edric felt there was nothing more to be done but depart, he also took up his hat, and they left the house in company.

They walked side by side in silence for some distance.

"I ought to have thanked you for your kind intentions in coming here," he began, with a sort of snappish humility. "I'm sure you meant well. You must forgive a poor old man whose pride in his family is broken down for ever. I've other matters on my mind, too. Public grievances as well as private misfortunes."

He was guiding Edric by a series of short cuts towards the more frequented thoroughfares, and now they stopped at the door of a small public-house. He noticed Edric's glance at the name: The Blue Dog, by P. Garraghty: and continued, slightly flurried. "I must explain. There is a meeting of parishioners here to-day. We have to concert measures to stem the tide of dangerous innovation that is sweeping over us. There is a memorial to the bishop in preparation. The crying scandal."

Edric was occupied hailing a hansom. "Is it such a bad case?" he asked, inattentively. "I should have thought you could have found worse elsewhere."

"Nowhere, sir, nowhere," with a fiery stamp of his umbrella; "that is, not to *my* knowledge. Not that I ever attend anywhere outside St. Fridolin's."

The hansom stopped. "Good-bye, Mr. Paramount. You must let me say that I don't see why your son shouldn't make his way up and be a credit to you." The old gentleman cut the subject short with an angry head-shake. "And I'm awfully sorry that you've other troubles as well; but—but," seeking for a consolatory word, "I daresay there are many worse places than St. Fridolin's, if you'd only look about you."

Mr. Paramount lifted his hat and turned sharply away, but as the swing door of The Blue Dog closed behind him, a meditative expression crossed his features, and he shook his head doubtfully.

As to Edric, he drove as fast as wheels could take him to the Archdales', only to find Sir John, Lady Archdale, and Hester, all out; and then to Mrs. Damien's, where he found a crowd of visitors, his hostess languid, absent, and absorbed in the discussion of the approaching journey: whilst Lady Monchalsea, triumphant and dictatorial, sang alternately the praises of Professor Montrose and the Honourable Ted Boughton.

He had done a bad day's work, he decided moodily that evening as he returned to Shorncliffe. He would have been still more convinced of it had he guessed the unwonted stir and agitation his visit had left behind him in Lavender Row. It would more have provoked than gratified him to know the audacious little fancies that set Elsie singing over her work, even while she could have beaten herself for sheer vexation at the remembrance of her own childish shyness in his presence. Elsie never cared to sit dreaming now. Life came too near and was too feverishly interesting. Was she not beginning to act a timid little part of her own in the great world-drama, instead of sitting a far-off, silent spectator? Hester's visit, following close on Edric's, excited her unaccountably. She unconsciously divined Hester's disapproval, and as unconsciously defied it. She tossed her head, and sang again over her lengths of cloth and lining. The machine began to run rather crookedly presently, and then came to a stop. She threw her work aside impatiently, and walked out into the passage, where she was fain to rest for a moment before creeping step by step up the staircase, mounting it for the second time only since the fall which had lamed her when a child.

Her face flushed, and she bit her lip and winced once or twice before she gained the door which Roswal had attacked so savagely; but she reached it at last, and, turning the handle, peeped timidly in. The room was long and low pitched, and the great window-shutter was closed to keep out some of the sunshine that even there made itself felt. There was a curtain screening a bed in a recess; a tall press with brass mountings; an iron cooking stove in the fireplace, a couch, and a long lounging chair in which Mrs. Beltran was lying, looking idly at the glints of light on the beams and rafters above her, and doing nothing else.



"Come in!" she cried, imperatively, without looking to see who entered. "I have been waiting for you. Lie down there."

A great black tom-cat rose from the soft, shabby cushions of the couch, and, after arching his back and turning his green eyes suspiciously on Elsie, vacated the place in her favour.

She dropped down gladly, and lay with her eyes closed for a while. Above her hung a blurred and tarnished convex mirror, round which damaged white cupids, noseless and armless, frolicked in chipped and blackened garlands of roses, on one of which was hitched a dried snake-skin. Beneath was a horrible little human figure into which the roots of some tree had twisted themselves, helped by some rude carving. It seemed to be pointing at Mrs. Beltran, and she gave it a friendly glance at times.

She looked attentively, but without rising, at Elsie's white face and closed eyes, and then extended her hand lazily to a low table near her on which stood a curious little vessel, a silver ball standing on three feet, the upper part perforated, and in one of the holes a silver tube. She gently drew with her lips at the tube once or twice.

A sweet spiced vapour ascended in filmy spirals and diffused itself through the room: not a drowsy or languid perfume; pungent and stimulating rather. Mrs. Beltran inhaled it with long, deep-drawn breaths, and the great cat came with a noiseless run, and would have sprung at it, but for a sharp command from his mistress that sent him crouching down with greedy eyes. She lent forward so as to hold the ball within a few inches of Elsie's face. The girl's nostrils quivered, her eyes opened and looked about brightly, and she rose with a smile.

"You were waiting for me?" she asked.

Mrs. Beltran replaced the vessel on its stand, and flung herself lazily back again, her long white arms tossed over her head. Her unbound masses of glossy, faintly rippling, blue-black hair streamed over her loose crimson wrapper. Her naked, yellowish-white foot balanced a velvet slipper on the toe.

"Little fool!" she spoke, with contemptuous good humour, "you doubt me, you try to deceive me, and would like to keep away from me—if you could." Elsie made a hasty gesture in protest. "You never meant to come here and tell me about your visitors, you know. Don't then. And don't come to me in your troubles. Stay away, and try what your grand friends can do for you."

"I did send a message to Mrs. Damien," Elsie admitted. "On Saturday, after we had heard from Sammy and were all so miserable; and Miss Archdale has been here just now. She was very kind—but —"

"But just a little too late in showing it, eh? You didn't feel to want consoling much by that time?"

"It was just as kind of her to come —"

"Are you a veritable simpleton or only a make-believe?" Mrs.

Beltran enquired, in her level, indifferent tone, with scarce a shade of emphasis. "Don't you see the worth of all that? Can you not see, silly one, how they will pet and patronise you willingly as long as you are content to stay, sickly and humble, well out of their way? Eh? But begin a little to know your own value. Dare to live for yourself; then see Miss Archdale look disgusted, and snub you, and put you back into your place again."

"Oh, don't!" pleaded Elsie, with great eyes of horror. "It makes me feel wicked to agree with you. They have all been so good, so good to me."

"Have they? How long have you known Mrs. Damien?"

"Since October; nearly eight months."

"And what has she done for you in that time? Petted you, lectured you on patience and resignation, given you a handful out of her wealth in alms, amused herself with your devotion." Mrs. Beltran was sitting upright by this time, her dusky hands gesticulating eloquently, though her voice was still low and level. "And I? How many days is it since you came to me?"

"Four days ago." Elsie hung her head and spoke under her breath.

"Four days ago! Is it only that since you crept here to me to remind me of my promise. You brought me your dead flower. You were faint and sick with crying over it—crying for your lost chance, perhaps—crying for your wasted youth—for your share of the world's happiness—how do I know! I gave you my help unquestioningly, and I will do it again. It would have been an easier task to make the dead blossom live again. Ah, now you open your eyes in foolish wonder, while you think nothing of greater things."

Mrs. Beltran rose with a swift, sudden movement and stood before Elsie, holding out to her the little box, in which lay a few yellow shrivelled leaves and a bare stalk. A wooden bucket of water stood by the stove. She lifted it to where Elsie could see into it. On the corner shelf above stood a large calabash, fancifully engraved, which she set afloat on the water like a tiny boat, and then shook the dead flower into it. She covered the top of the bucket with the large silk handkerchief which she had worn knotted round her throat, glancing as she did so at Elsie's face, all alive with devouring curiosity.

"You must have patience," she said.

"Four days!" she went on, "and scarcely as many hours in those as Mrs. Damien has had weeks. Would I keep you humble, weak, and dependent on me for your poor little morsels of enjoyment? No!"

She was pacing the room now with her graceful, velvet tread, her glowing robe trailing behind her, and the cat walking step for step at her side, his great tail erect and stiff, only the point waving gently.

"No, a thousand times no! I have given you your youth again; health and strength; beauty—look for yourself in that glass. And I say to you 'Go and take for yourself of the good things that life holds

for the young, the strong, the beautiful !' There is pleasure in hand-fuls for the young and strong ; and for beauty there is—Love !"

She stopped full in front of Elsie, who covered her burning cheeks with her hands, while her eyes shone half in delight, half in terror.

"Love ? That means a lover ?" she whispered.

"Keep your secrets to yourself, child. I want none of them. The day may come when you would give your heart's blood for the power I hold in my hand. You know I do ?"

Elsie bowed assentingly.

"The day will come when the world is too strong for you ; when you will see him drifting, drifting away out of your reach, and your grand friends will be the first to draw him from you. Then come to me, and I will cast back to you none of your miserable doubts and cruel thoughts of me. You need say but 'Help me !' and if he were at the church door with Mrs. Damien he should leave her and come back to you."

Elsie's brows knitted for a second. "I don't think I should care for a lover who had to be brought back to me," she said, lifting her head rather proudly. "You don't *quite* understand me yet. I am grateful, you don't know how grateful, to you for all you have done for me, but I don't want you to do anything more. Give me the health and strength you promised me, and perhaps I shall be able to keep the lover for myself," and she laughed roguishly.

Mrs. Beltran laughed too, secretly a trifle perplexed by this sudden outbreak of spirit on the girl's part. "Well done ! You deserve him, and I hope he'll come soon to take care of you when I am gone away with my husband."

"Gone away ?" rather blankly.

"Did you think I should stay here for ever ? He is in good employment, filling his pockets with money, and in six weeks or so they will be full and he will come back, and we shall live in an hotel and go to the theatre every night. Yes, and you shall come too, and drive in a carriage, and know what champagne tastes like." Mrs. Beltran stopped in her walk and sank again into her chair, smiling jovially in frank enjoyment of the prospect. "And when he's a rich man——"

"But the money won't last for ever."

"What then ? There's more to be made. Heh, Zombi ?" and she kicked off her slipper and caressed her black familiar with her small, bare foot. "We've had our bad times together. A feast to-day and the bare bones to pick to-morrow, when Morris has left us with five shillings to last us till he comes home again." Zombi winked appreciatively. "Now you are both going to be great gentlemen, English lords—with estates and an income and grand relations. Wait, only wait awhile. You believe in me, if no one else does."

Zombi rolled suddenly over and caught the bare foot with all his claws at once, and pretended to inflict a sharp bite. Then he got up and prowled restlessly.

His mistress dropped into sudden silence. Zombi ended by placing himself in front of her and uttering a short muffled cry once or twice. Then shaking her long hair down, so that it shrouded her face like a veil, she commenced a low monotonous croon in a language Elsie did not understand. It went on for many minutes, a melancholy chant with a constantly recurring burden.

At the first notes Zombi had risen and, stepping gravely, begun to pace round and round the bucket till Elsie grew dizzy with watching him, uttering his cry at intervals. Suddenly the song stopped, and he, too, stood motionless. Elsie dared not break the silence that followed. It fell on her like the touch of a cold hand in the warm exciting air of the place. Mrs. Beltran rose, and with bowed head and outstretched hands muttered what seemed a giving of thanks, and signed to Elsie to uncover the water.

There, on its surface, floated a flower-gem in its fairy boat, fresh, glowing, perfumed, and Elsie, with a cry, fell on her knees beside it.

"Take it," spoke Mrs. Beltran. "It will live—this one—till it has done its work."

Elsie seized it greedily, then raised her eyes from it to her friend's dark face alight with strange meaning. "Its work?" she demanded, doubtfully.

"Oh, no, I cannot take it!" she cried, with sudden energy. "How do I know what its work may be? Oh, forgive me. You are wise and strong, I am weak and ignorant, and I am frightened—I am frightened! Not of you only but of myself. I dare take no more from your hands. I am grateful from the depths of my heart for what you have already done, but no more, no more! Oh, forgive me, and take this back!"

She almost flung the flower at the feet of Mrs. Beltran, and walked resolutely to the door. Mrs. Beltran, gazing at her with a dull, lowering look, marked how her face flushed with pain though she kept back all other sign. Zombi gained the couch-back with a fierce, silent spring, his fur on end, his eyes giving out wicked sparks of green light.

At the door Elsie paused with her hand on the latch, but it was only to turn a piteous, childish face full of tears on her would-be benefactress, as if asking forgiveness for all offence, and then she went away.

Mrs. Beltran resumed her seat, her chin on her hands, her face inscrutable, except, perhaps, to Zombi, who placed himself in front of her, his green eyes on her velvet-black ones. Neither stirred till the cat gently extended his fore-paws to their utmost stretch and drew them back, the claws cutting and tearing the rug with a slow, savage enjoyment. Then his mistress cut her meditations short with a laugh and shrug of her shoulders, and, throwing herself back, settled herself to the contemplations of the good times to come, chanting to herself a jovial ditty, more curious than elegant, with a refrain of

"Hourre! Maringo! baisez-moi!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

MAJOR RANDOLF STANNARD.

ON the Friday following, the scanty congregation of St. Fridolin's had a reinforcement of one. A tall gentleman strode across the churchyard from the Vicarage, some time after the bell had stopped and the last tardy worshipper disappeared into the porch.

Once established in a pew, his behaviour, screened from the Vicar's notice by an interposing pillar, was not edifying, viewed as a model of church-going deportment. He stood and turned about as it pleased him, regarding the sacred edifice with a sort of proprietary interest, looking critically at the decorations, the congregation, and the clergyman, and finally, almost before the last words of the benediction had been uttered, seizing his hat and striding, with a lively and secular tread, straight up to the reading-desk with "Hillo! Eustace!"

"Randolf, my dear fellow!" and the surpliced Vicar took the intruder by the arm and impelled him into the vestry, where the door shut them off from the sight of the scandalised spectators.

The two men clasped hands warmly, and stood looking into one another's face with delight and affection beyond words, till Randolf enquired: "Am I in the way here? Any fair penitents about?"

"Nonsense!" said the Vicar, divesting himself of his surplice. "Come along. Where have you come from? How long have you been in town?"

"I came up by the early train and have been all over the place since. Agents, Stores, Truefitt's, every other shop in Regent Street and half over Westbourne Grove, hunting for some stuff that Amy wants. I made up my mind to get all her commissions cleared off first and come here in comfort."

Eustace hurried on to the Vicarage to announce his brother's arrival, but Mrs. Goodliffe had already seen Major Randolf, who was a prime favourite of hers, and guest-chamber and dinner were, he found, in an advanced stage of preparation. Returning to his study, he found Randolf standing with his back to the empty grate, looking around with a comical critical air.

"So these are your new diggings, eh? Rather different from St. Ermentrude's, where I left you. Do you mean to say you consider this promotion?"

"I think I was right in coming here," said his brother, sedately. "I am very well satisfied."

"Oh, well, you know best. It doesn't strike me as the right thing by any means. Eldest sons have no business to be parsons. I can't think what my father was about to make one of you. At any rate there should be some reasonable system of promotion that would give you a chance of retiring as a bishop—or, well, come—an arch-



deacon by the time you come into the property. It would be only decent."

"There was no question of the title, you remember, at the time when I decided to take orders, and I should have done the same in any case. Never mind me. Tell me about yourself and Amy. Is she at Malta?"

"No, of course not! I brought her home a fortnight ago. We ought to have been in England a month sooner, but there was something going on that Amy *would* stay for. As usual, she overdid it and was awfully bad. I thought I should never get her to England alive. Her mother came to us at Southsea, and uncommonly glad I was to see her. Well, the affair is over at last, thank goodness!"

The Vicar looked up with an awakened face. "Do you mean to say —?"

"Of course I do. Didn't I write and tell you about the baby? Such a jolly little beggar! No? I suppose I didn't as it only arrived four days ago. I really had no time for anything but looking after Amy before it came."

"Have you told them at Altcar?"

"Well, no, I haven't. I shall see them on Monday. I want to stay with you till then, if you'll have me, and I thought it would save bother if I kept it quiet till we met. My mother will be agitating for details you know, and I'd rather be shot than write anything longer than a post-card. I wanted to telegraph, only Amy wouldn't, as it was only a girl."

"A girl?"

"Didn't I say so? Awfully disappointing—at least, Amy feels it. I'm just as pleased, but she, poor little woman, had set her heart on its being a boy; and, in fact, was rather hurt that my father didn't expect her to come to Altcar—for it to be born there, you know."

"My mother's state of health," Eustace began, apologetically.

"Oh, yes, I know, but Amy said when it was a question of the birth of the heir —"

Major Stannard stopped suddenly in some confusion, which his brother covered by a suggestion about preparing for dinner, and conducted him upstairs, smiling to himself rather grimly. There was a strong likeness between the brothers, as they sat facing one another in the lamp-light at the small round table. That Major Stannard's hair was lighter and crisper, his mouth covered by a heavy blond moustache, and his eyes round and boyish, instead of deep-set and thoughtful, seemed absolutely the only points of difference except that of expression; and that was less striking when Eustace brightened up at his brother's presence, or the recollection of Amy's sufferings toned down Randolph's high spirits.

The consciousness of the slip of the tongue into which he had been betrayed was still present with the Major. He glanced once or twice at his brother, doubtfully, and at last put down his knife and fork and began apologetically.

"I say, you know, Eustace, I didn't really mean anything by what I said just now. You won't take it amiss, will you? Of course, we all know *you* may marry any day, and uncommonly glad I shall be to hear it; and then, naturally, it will be all up with our boy's prospects —"

"Your *boy*? I thought you said a girl."

"Yes, yes, this child is certainly a girl; but a boy may come any day, and Amy says she really cannot settle her mind till she knows what your views really are, she is sure they are *far* too strict to allow of your marrying. Now, I don't say that, and should be uncommonly sorry to hear it."

"I have taken no vows of celibacy, if that is what you mean," began Eustace, slowly.

"That's right. Glad to hear it," interrupted Randolph, cordially.

"But there may be other reasons. Did my father ever suggest as much to you?" he asked, suddenly and sharply.

"Not a word. He seemed pretty clear of your intentions, though, now I come to think of it. But I expect he'd be just as pleased as anyone, when it came to the point, to see you settled, with a jolly little wife of your own—like Amy for instance." Eustace gave a private shudder of negation. "Dear little woman! Ah, you've only seen her ill and out of sorts"—possibly detecting his brother's lack of enthusiasm—"but when things go right with her, you've no idea what a fascinating, sweet little thing she is."

Eustace had pushed aside his untasted plate, and sat out the rest of the meal in almost total silence. Randolph ran on gaily, taking his brother's attention for granted. It was long since they had met—more than three years, except for a brief space one day about a year ago, when Eustace had run down to Southsea to make his sister-in-law's acquaintance between the arrival of a down and the departure of an up-train. He drifted on to politics at last; Egypt; the attitude of France and Turkey; all the possibilities of the day.

"We shall be in the fun at any rate," Randolph said, casually. "They can't do our regiment out of that."

Eustace started and dropped the glass he was holding with a crash. "What! *You*? I never thought of that. You going on active service?"

Randolph looked with amused contempt on his brother's alarmed face. "Of course. What then?"

"You ought not to go, Randolph. Some arrangement must be made—some exchange effected."

"What bosh! Do you quite understand what you are talking about, my dear boy? I think I see myself exchanging just now! Supposing every officer began to take care of himself, and go home directly war was declared —"

"I know—I know—but yours is an exceptional case. If you were the eldest son, with much depending on your life —"

"Which, thank heaven, I am not. I've thought so all my life. I'm fond enough of Altcar and the old folks, but to be tied by the leg to a place—ugh!"

"But as a married man."

"Well, if *that* interfered, it would drive me to wish myself unmarried almost, and I don't know how I can put it stronger."

"Are you sure that your regiment will be sent?"

"It's bound to be, and, to tell you the truth, that's why I wanted to get my poor girl safe to England with her friends."

"Does she know the possibility?"

"Why, I couldn't keep it from her, could I? She behaves splendidly about it. We had a dreadful scene at first. She was in hysterics for two days because I couldn't promise to take her with me; but now that's over we can settle things comfortably. She has lots of friends in Southsea who will keep her amused and won't let her fret. Of course it will be an anxious time, but she needn't mope more than she can help."

"She had better go to Altcar. I am sure they will be glad to have her. That will be the fittest home for her and the child—if you have to leave them."

"So I thought, but she says it would be too trying. If my father and mother get anxious about me she never could bear up, she is sure. A quiet, sad house like that would kill her. She thought they might like to take the baby. There really isn't much room in the Southsea house, and when I go she must have some people to stay with her. She cannot bear being left for a day——" Randolph broke off and looked earnestly across the table at his brother, who had sunk into a brown study. "I wonder—won't you—I don't think you did see Amy at her best," he went on, incoherently, "and, perhaps, you don't understand how full of real feeling she is. I wish you did," wistfully. "It would be a good thing for me, Eustace, if I never come back again, to know that there is someone to stand by the little woman. She *can't* bear trouble or sorrow. It's no use finding fault with her for her nature. She feels things more than other people, you see, and if I'm not with her to help her, she'll die. Won't you promise me to do all you can for her—and—and—to be a little patient with her? I tell you, Eustace, it makes me *mad* to think of having to leave her all alone, to fight her own battles, my poor dependent Amy!"

Randolf's broad chest gave a great heave, and he dropped his face on his hand. Eustace rose and stood beside him, his hand on his shoulder.

"You did not need to ask me this, Randolph. Who is nearer to me in the world than you? God grant your dear ones may be spared the need of my care and have you safe home again."

Randolf smiled up at him. "You have always been the best of good fellows, Eustace. I wonder how many scrapes you have pulled me through in my time?"

"I wonder how many times you have been tempted to knock me down for an interfering prig. You've had an uncommon lot of patience and forbearance with me in your day, I suspect."

Then they both laughed, and, lighting up their cigars, stepped out into the fresh June night and sat on the big tombstone, talking by snatches or enjoying one another's presence in silence—a significant sign of good understanding—till the great June moon sank behind the chimney pots.

Major Randolph's plans for a long day's holiday with his brother only survived the arrival of the first post next morning.

"How do you get to Richmond?" he asked, suddenly.

"You go to Waterloo to begin with. What do you want there?"

"It's a hideous nuisance, but I've got to go, it seems. Some friends of Amy's live there. People she took a fancy to on the P. and O. steamer coming home. She's gone and written to them to arrange that I shall go down and see them this afternoon; dine there, possibly. Confound their civility."

"Telegraph an excuse."

"That won't do either. Amy thinks she'd like to go and stay with them some day, and I'm to suggest it if they seem open to the idea. Don't you see?"

The Vicar did see, and bowed to the decrees of Fate and the Hon. Mrs. Stannard. "We must make the most of the morning then. What shall we do?"

The poor Major's face lengthened dolorously. "Here's another nuisance. Amy says I must get home by Thursday, so that cuts off the day I meant to have in town after Altcar. I've a lot to do about uniform and things of that sort, so I've only got to-day to do it in. It's no good asking you to come with me to Richmond, is it? Amy suggests that the Maxwells will be charmed to see you if I take you down, but I don't know——"

"Certainly not." Eustace promptly disposed of this cool suggestion. "I think I can devise a better plan. I must go down to Altcar at once. I—I have a special reason. I can start this morning and you can come down straight from Richmond. We can spend Sunday together there as well as here, and I can come up by the early train on Monday."

"Better than nothing," assented the Major, who was still perusing his wife's letter with a bothered air.

"Amy is quite well, I hope, and the baby?" Eustace enquired.

"All right. She asks after you, sends her love, you know, and says—how women's heads *do* run on marriage!" broke off Randolph, with an impatient laugh. "I suppose I can tell her you have nothing of the sort at present in view? It would really compose her mind, she says, and save her all that she went through before this baby was born, if she quite knew your intentions; so as to know how to look upon the boy—when he comes."

"I am afraid I can give her no comfort," spoke Eustace, in a tone that made his brother look up astonished. "The question will be decided for me before very long, I daresay. Whichever way it is decided will be final; and I can promise to let her know with all speed. Will that pacify her mind—until the heir is born?"

If there were a sneer latent in the last words Major Stannard did not detect it, merely giving an approving nod and a murmured "Good luck to you, my boy," with an emphatic shake of his broad shoulders, as if he felt them lightened of the burden of Amy's last and weightiest commission.

Then he departed to his tailor's, leaving his brother to arrange for the next day's services.

"*To-morrow!*" exclaimed Lionel de Cressy when informed of the change. "Shall you be away to-morrow?"

"I have a particular reason for wishing to be at Altcar with my brother, or I should not think of leaving you just now."

"Oh, it's not that. We shall get on right enough. I was thinking of Mrs. Damien. You know she is going away?"

Eustace nodded, apparently intent on the papers on his writing-table.

"I told you, didn't I, that I met her at Lady Vesey's concert, and she said she wanted to say good-bye to her girls after Evensong."

"Yes. And then?" queried the Vicar, still impassive.

"She said, you know, that she hoped she should see you then. It was her last chance, she said. She seemed to make quite a point of my telling you so," said the Curate, enviously. "Won't it look rather marked if you don't leave some message, or write or call?"

Lionel had got rather into the way of regarding his Vicar as a sort of venerable hermit; to be revered for his wisdom and virtues, but also occasionally to be guided and enlightened as to the customs of the outer world.

"I shall not forget," Mr. Stannard answered, with a repressed smile playing round the corners of his mouth. "I will certainly write or call. You may be sure I shall not let Mrs. Damien leave England without my seeing her."

"You ought to call on a Monday; that is the day to find her at home," said the Curate, still in his capacity of mentor, and then left the Vicar to his preparations for his journey.

The smile soon faded from Eustace's lips, and the dark shadow that his brother's words had raised settled down on his face again. He rested his head on his hands, as if wearied with long and anxious thought. The morning had brought him no nearer to the solution of the difficulties over which he had vexed himself the night through.

On his table lay a pile of letters unfolded and arranged in order of their dates. Under his hand, while de Cressy had been speaking, lay another which he had selected from the rest. They were all in



the same writing—a man's hand—bold and clear, with a family likeness to his own endorsement, "Letters from my Father, 1872—1879."

He took them up, one by one, and looked over them afresh, as if hoping that morning's light might bring him some new insight. They were excellent letters to read. More like those of an elder brother than a father—supposing an elder brother should ever put himself out of the way to make his letters specially welcome. Full of keen interest in Eustace's own doings, with a few useful hints and morsels of worldly wisdom dropped here and there casually, and with no affectation of superiority. Bits of home news, gossip social and political, graphic descriptions of the writer's own experiences. Eustace broke off, almost overcome by the recollection of how welcome it had all been once upon a time. They extended through the years of his Oxford life and his first curacy, and were signed "E. Redgrave Stannard."

The last was signed "Altcar," and contained the problem, the key to which he had been vainly searching throughout all the rest.

"This must and shall be explained before I go further. It has been sheer cowardice not to have insisted on an understanding sooner. Not altogether cowardice," he went on, defending himself against himself. "It's not altogether cowardice that makes me shrink from accusing my dear old father of senseless, unjust caprice; from facing the fact that I have been supplanted by my younger brother—all unknowingly, good old fellow. I am not afraid of an explanation. It cannot be worse than the facts which I have already accepted."

His time was flying. He hastily put away his letters, all but the one, which he carefully secured in his pocket-book.

"I am better off than many an Esau," he said to himself, with sudden, irrepressible bitterness. "I have had no choice in the disposal of my birthright, and I am offered a handsome sum down in commutation of the blessing."

*(To be continued.)*

## PAUL SMITH, A.R.A.

## I.

THE morning sun was streaming into a large wainscoted room, filling it with beauty, shining through the small panes of three tall narrow windows, severely draped in Syrian muslin curtains.

Outside, the Thames flowed on, past the old Chelsea wooden bridge, spanning it, in a glory of dazzling, sparkling light.

The furniture in the room had an old-world look. But that comfort was not sacrificed to appearance was shown in the somewhat unwieldy Indian-cane lounging chairs and a couch, made beautiful by a gold embroidered cashmere shawl covering it. Persian rugs and soft and glossy furs gave tone and colour to the plain golden-coloured panels of the room. At the further end a fine piece of old tapestry, partly drawn aside, screened off a smaller room, lighted by a window of olive-green glass, showing a narrow door in the wainscot, leading, it might be, to a deep cupboard, or a passage communicating with the corridor. Yellow daffodils, in quaint Japanese bronze pots, delicious bits of blue and white, vividly coloured fans, dashed here and there in bright flashes, amid the various objects of art, were hardly needed to show that it was an artist's home.

The studio was further embellished by the occupants, two young men. One, the owner, was smoking while his facile pencil rapidly sketched on a small wooden block, listening the while to his companion's talk. For Paul Smith, although ambitious of better things, was industrious and could ill afford to waste time. Pending the arrival of the expected model for his important picture on the easel, he was finishing one of the numerous orders for a popular magazine.

The tall Chippendale timepiece struck ten as he impatiently exclaimed: "Isabel's late this morning. Strange! As a rule she is the most dependable of women."

"Are women ever to be depended upon?" his friend, the Honourable Hugo Somerville, asked, gazing absently at the picture on the easel.

"*She* is. Glad you seem to like my picture. Do you care to see the lines it illustrates?" And the artist handed an open book over to Somerville; who, having been attaché at St. Petersburg and other foreign Courts, was sufficiently well up to understand the verses written in old French; he read aloud:

"A votre maîtresse envoys  
Ce qu'elle mande; mais pour moy,  
Garde le parfum de la rose,  
Y en mon cuer le tiens enclose."

"Quaint and pretty," he said. Then turning again to the picture, he added: "And now for your translation of it."

Paul Smith pointing to the centre figure with his mahlstick, began in an oratorical tone: "Here you behold the late charmer of his faithless majesty, Francis I. *Le roi gallant*, in defiance of the maxim to be off with the old love, &c., sends, at a woman's instigation, of course, for the love tokens and jewels he had given his old flame."

"And pray who was the old love?" Hugo asked, interrupting his friend's flow of eloquence.

"*Françoise de Foix, Comtesse de Châteaubriant*. And as you may observe, she obeyed his Majesty's command, but returns them in a grand smash, worthless as his affection: a sentiment embodied in the neat lines you have been reading. There's not another girl in London with such a head of hair: the true Old Master shade. Leonardo should have painted her instead of the arch-sinner Francis.

"Magnificent! And a lovely face. Haven't you flattered her? Hasn't she freckles?"

"No!" Paul replied honestly. "I couldn't flatter her if I tried; she is simply beautiful. Look at her photo, there; even without colour it is lovely."

Hugo Somerville took a portrait from the looking-glass, and gave it a long serious gaze. "Perfect," he exclaimed at length.

"Yes! and she's as good as she's perfect," Paul continued. "For when I was down with typhoid fever last year, that girl nursed me like a mother. She had been a hospital nurse for a few months and was up to the work; she pulled me through too. Sir William Carstairs said he could do nothing; all depended upon my constitution, and upon nursing and care. I owe my life to her."

"Of course you'll pay your debt and marry her, live happily ever after, and so end—or begin—the romance."

"It would end the romance indeed, my dear fellow! I can't afford it."

"Why, it would pay in the long run; she'd sit to you gratis. Marry her: I would, if I were you."

"If I were *you*, I might; the Honourable Hugo Somerville may indulge in matrimonial eccentricities; but I owe it to the time-honoured name of Smith to be more particular. An imprudent marriage would ruin my career."

"Is she common?" Hugo enquired eagerly.

"No! uncommon enough—one of Nature's gentlewomen, though I believe her father was a gentleman. But I want the happy combination of Nature and Art—allied to wealth."

"I should go in for such a combination as I see here, and leave destiny to take care of itself," cried Somerville, touching the photo, as he spoke, almost reverently.

Smith laughed. "There goes the door! She'll be in directly, and you can judge for yourself."

Rising, he drew the portière aside, and looked into the small room. It was empty. Opening the door, he looked beyond into the passage. No one. He returned and remarked, in a disappointed tone: "Isabel has not come, yet I was sure I heard the door close. I must have been mistaken."

Somerville felt equally sure, but said nothing.

Reluctantly he stuck the photo again in the corner of the glass, after carefully noticing the address scrawled in pencil at the back. He suddenly remembered an important engagement, and hurriedly left the artist.

Paul remained plunged in a brown study, which, if put into words, would have been to the effect, that however charming Isabel Gray might be, it behoved him to marry for something more than love. Money or rank: the one would add to his comfort, the other, to his popularity as a fashionable portrait painter, the summit of his ambition. Looking at the luxuries surrounding him; remembering the high rent he paid for the studio and the low state of his finances; the hand to mouth life he led; a visionary account at his banker's, existing only in the imagination of his fellow Bohemians; remembering all this, he knew how little he could afford to indulge in that luxury of the wealthy—a love match!

Pshaw! With the thought the image of Isabel arose, and "the tender grace of a day that is dead"—her devoted care of him in that serious illness. True, he was unconscious of the extent of her sacrifice; the necessities she deprived herself of to minister to his comfort, to procure the little luxuries tempting to an invalid's sickly appetite; the weary days, the broken nights, passed at his bedside. These were only vaguely known to him, chiefly comprehended in Sir William's memorable verdict: "You owe your life to your nurse."

He could not forget the succeeding days when convalescence had set in; the short country excursions, Isabel's bright happiness. Holidays that left pleasant memories. Walks under the magnificent chestnuts in Bushey Park, and the stately Limes, shading the clear stream peopled with large speckled trout, in the Palace gardens. Windsor Castle and the Park; and Isabel's childish delight as a brilliantly plumed cock pheasant majestically crossed their path, or a partridge whirled past them, rising in startled flight from amid the bracken. Sometimes her mother would accompany them in these excursions, but often they were alone. How she revelled in the country, hating her London prison! yet, how bravely she had worked and toiled to keep her widowed mother! And now, as a friendless orphan—her mother had lately died—she was steadily doing her duty, fighting bravely through the many troubles and temptations to which her calling more particularly exposed her.

With a trifle of unwonted tenderness, he recalled the silvery tones of her voice, uneducated, but sweet and true as a bird's song. Poor Isabel! Was it love that taught her those soft modulations?

Slowly he puffed out the smoke, idly watching it float into thin air, carrying away with it the sweet thoughts of the past. The pipe finished, he laid it aside, and with it, his dream of what might have been. Resolutely he went once more to work; and the drawing finished, dashed off a few words of inquiry to Isabel. Ringing for his servant, he gave him the letter for Miss Gray and the block, to be left at their respective destinations.

Upon receiving them, the man said Miss Gray had called by appointment, but feeling indisposed, had gone home.

"Why did you not give me the message at once?" Smith inquired with a growl.

"I thought Miss Gray had seen you, sir. She went upstairs and said it was of no consequence, as you had a gentleman with you."

With these words the servant hastily fled, leaving Paul in a far from amiable mood.

"Marry her!" The words haunted him. He missed her, and without her would work no more. Reluctantly taking his hat, he went to the Row, only to acknowledge that amid the throng of highborn beauties not one surpassed the girl he was seeking to dismiss from his thoughts.

On his return he was surprised to realise the eagerness with which he looked for the reply to his note; the blank feeling of disappointment upon his servant telling him there was no answer.

The following morning he called at Fitzroy Street. Miss Gray was "not at home." He went off in a huff, and sulked for two days, painting in the draperies from the lay figure. Then, artistic despair compelled him to knock under. He wrote in almost abject terms to Isabel, convinced of a favourable reply. The letter was returned with the words "Gone away."

Paul Smith hardly knew whether he was more grieved or annoyed as he repeated aloud, "Gone away!"

## II.

SOME nine or ten years have passed away. Paul Smith, A.R.A., stands, if not on the very pinnacle of fame, at least in a fair way to lessen by one the three magic initials attached to his name.

Clever and the fashion, his portraits are in demand, and if to the chosen few the stamp of genius be wanting, none can deny his success in catching the likeness of his sitters, and his seizing upon the happy moment when they are looking their best, as he puts it, or by grossly flattering them, as his detractors—and they are many—put it. Envious enemies, and adverse critics are but another proof, if any be wanting, of his success.

He had made art pay. A windfall in an unlooked-for legacy had enabled him to build up for himself a comfortable fortune, and a gorgeous red-brick mongrel Queen Anne palace, among the palatial shrines in that eminent painters' corner, clustering together on the outskirts of a well-known historical park. A park under whose time-



honoured trees Addison and his fair patroness walked and talked and held their court : a bright constellation of wit and beauty, around whom innumerable lesser satellites revolved.

The studio itself is a marvellous reproduction of a Damascus room. It is rich in curiously carved wooden lattices and screens, walls and arched recesses, whereon gorgeous mosaic and brilliantly coloured texts from the Koran shine out in a maze of lustrous splendour. The whole is toned down by the subdued tints of rich Oriental draperies falling in soft folds from under the horseshoe arched doorway.

Magnificent Indian rugs cover a low, broad divan, filling a deep recess. In front of these stand low tables inlaid with pearl and ivory, while from the fretted ceiling hang silver lamps, ostrich eggs and the various accessories that eastern imagination and skill can devise, plus "an ebon slave." A Hindu, who hands the fragrant coffee in rare china cups, in silver jewelled stands, or the picturesque narghileh or amber-mouthed chibouque.

The place of honour is given to the unfinished picture—"Love Tokens," whence Isabel Gray's luminous eyes shine out in reproachful, indignant scorn, in the ill-starred Françoise de Foix. The morning sun brings out the lustre of the ruddy golden hair.

Once again two men are seated in the studio : Paul and a friend, John Graham, an artist, less successful than himself. Paul is holding up a water-colour drawing and surveying it indulgently, albeit critically. It was the sketch of a girl in a fanciful peasant dress, crowned with a wreath of hawthorn.

"I rather think this 'May Queen' will fetch the fair lady. Lady May Bramston asked me to draw a pretty get-up for her to wear at the Duchess of Cloverly's ball."

"Ah!" said his friend. "By the time your artistic design passes through the dressmaker's hands you won't recognise your own sketch. Lady May? I thought you were going in for December, *not* May?"

This was in allusion to a certain wealthy, if somewhat mature, widowed countess, whose open partiality for the artist was the talk of the clubs.

Paul, not ill-pleased at the insinuation, replied : "May is the month for our profession ; when we are hanged, skied, or rejected ! But apropos of December——"

He opened a portfolio, and taking out a drawing in coloured chalks, passed it to Graham.

"Norma. That's for the Countess of Steynham, Lady May's aunt, who goes in for High Art and the classics."

Graham, honestly admiring and secretly enjoying his brother artist's talent, inquired :

"And which do you go in for, Ancient or Modern?"

Ignoring the innuendo, Paul answered severely :

"Modern, and I am off now to the Private View. Of course we shall meet?"

"No such luck. You forget I'm one of the 'rejected'."

"Pardon me, old fellow! Better luck next time."

As he spoke, the successful man cordially grasped his friend's hand, infusing a delicate shade of sympathy in his tone and a warm pressure of his fingers. Graham, flattered and pleased, took the hint, and left.

Paul carefully rolled up the drawings, and, addressing them respectively to the Countess of Steynham and the Lady May Bramston, lighted a pipe, and proceeding to smoke it, built up as fragile and glittering a castle as any in cloudland.

### III.

THE Private View at the Academy was crowded as ever, spite of the additional accommodation afforded by the spacious rooms of the new building. R. A.s and A. R. A.s and a host of budding and as yet undecorated artists mingled with the gay throng of butterfly beauties. These were arrayed in all the glories of the rainbow; draped in "arrangements" of every variety of fashion, past, present or to come, from the Conquest down to the days of our own good and gracious Queen.

Paul was irresistibly drawn to his own picture, a portrait of Lady May Bramston. It was well hung, although above the line. Standing before it was a tall and graceful woman, from under whose small black bonnet a gleam of burnished golden hair escaped. The artist's quick eye noted the effect of the sunlight in bringing out the warm tones.

"First rate back study," he reflected, as he waited patiently to see if the front view were equally good.

Turning slightly to refer to the catalogue, he saw an oval face, with clear, well cut, straight features, a pure colourless complexion, dark curling lashes fringing the downcast eyes, conscious of and annoyed at his admiring gaze. A faint colour slowly rose in her cheeks, adding marvellous brightness and life to the hitherto statuesque beauty. She had apparently found the artist's name, when, looking up, their eyes met, hers with a startled look in them. The rosy flush died out of the face, and as she abruptly turned away, a jewelled pencil dropped from her trembling fingers. Paul stooped and, raising his hat, restored it to her. Silently, she bowed her thanks and passed on. What haunting likeness was there in the face, what vague resemblance, recalling a long since lost and forgotten memory?

Isabel Gray—yes—she, the poor model, might have been like this majestic beauty, this glorious woman—had she, too, been happy, rich, and in a similar position.

From room to room he followed her, as, looking straight before her, heedless of the crowd, she hurried on.

In his eager pursuit he stumbled over a gorgeous peacock-feather-

trimmed train. An ominous rent was the result, as with an abject apology he sought to free himself from the hopelessly involved draperies. He was tearing the train and himself away, when the indignant wearer confronted him.

"Lady Steynham!"

The angry frown at his awkwardness subsided, the dark face lighted up with a pleasant smile, an outstretched many-buttoned lavender hand was extended in friendly greeting.

"Don Pablo!" she exclaimed. The foreign title conferred upon Paul by the fair widow was a tribute to his eminently Spanish appearance, artistically enhanced by the picturesque style he affected. "I am delighted to see you. I've been longing for an intelligent and sympathetic guide through this bewildering labyrinth of genius and beauty. How fortunate! Never mind the gown; these damages are easily repaired. Hush! not a word."

She gathered up the folds of the train, and resting her hand lightly on his arm, continued:

"Take me to see your picture. I am dying to know if they have done justice to your genius, and May's beauty."

The unlucky man was buttonholed, and when at last, pleading an important engagement, he made his escape, the fair unknown had vanished. Inquiries of the man at the turnstile resulted in the information that a lady answering to his description had just passed through. He dashed down the stairs, too late. A victoria was driven away as he reached the door, and as it turned into Piccadilly he had a vision of a lovely profile and a gleam of golden hair.

#### IV.

IN the Countess of Steynham's boudoir three people were merrily chatting over their afternoon tea. The subject under discussion was an entertainment to be given at Steynham House, for which cards were to be issued forthwith. Lady May Bramston was begging for a fancy dress ball; her aunt, Lady Steynham, was in favour of tableaux, and Paul Smith was specially called upon to decide between the ladies.

"I feel my responsible position as umpire," he was saying, adroitly deciding to please both if possible. "I should advise a series of tableaux, illustrating the progress of Art."

Lady Steynham looked delighted; Lady May disappointed, when Paul continued:

"Concluding with a costume ball. We could start with a classical subject, either a single figure or a group—say 'Pygmalion and Galatea,' then by a long step, on to Preraphaelitism—a Madonna, by Licinio, or better still—'Monna Lisa.' Mediæval Art could be fairly shown by Albert Dürer's 'Melancholia,' whence Holbein, Vandyck, and Rubens would gently lead to the English School, Gainsborough, Reynolds, a Hogarth, perhaps, and so on to our own period."

Lady Steynham interrupted laughingly.

"I must veto the whole thing. It is too long, too much, and too artistic for the general public. As hostess, I must consider my guests."

"Oh, aunt!" Lady May observed piteously, while Paul looked annoyed.

"If you like to have, say one or two tableaux as a lever de rideau, May shall have her wish, and we will decide upon a costume ball."

She addressed the last words to Paul, adding with a gracious smile: "We will put up your large picture, the woman with the red hair and the broken ornaments: that unfinished one that hangs in your studio."

"Willingly," replied Paul. "It will make an excellent tableau. But who will sit for the fair dame?"

As he put the question, a vision rose before him of the beautiful unknown.

"If we could only get Lady Somerville—she has just that shade of red hair," said May.

"Lady Somerville," Paul inquired; "who is she? Years ago I knew a brother of Lord Somerville; he died in India, or was it Canada? He was attaché somewhere in the frigid or the torrid zone."

"It's the same. He inherited the title, married, and died abroad. His wife was an Australian, very rich; all over diamonds and nuggets. You must have met her; she is very lovely." Lady May spoke with the generous enthusiasm of youth; her aunt adding as a rider: "And *not* very young."

"She doesn't look more than twenty," the young girl replied; "though of course she is more. If only she would come, the tableaux would be perfect. But you don't know her, aunt."

"Silly child! what has that to do with it? Si c'est impossible cela se fera. Give me another cup of tea and don't trouble about my affairs. I undertake that Lady Somerville shall play the Beauty, and Don Pablo shall be the Messenger. And don't lose your heart, for I hear she's engaged to Lord Duncan Glenholm."

Paul assured the ladies that he was arrow proof, with a look and expression that conveyed to his hearers the idea that they, individually, were his protecting ægis from love's wiles. And having conveyed the desired impression, he left.

## V.

LADY STEYNHAM succeeded in her aim. She was introduced to Lady Somerville, and she prevailed upon her to undertake a part in the tableaux; this was, however, only upon condition that rehearsals were dispensed with. Lady Somerville requesting a photograph of the picture. In vain Lady Steynham suggested a visit to the studio. Lady Somerville declared "she hated artists, as they expected so much flattery and adulation;" and the Countess, only too happy to secure the Beauty, willingly acceded to the terms she mentally voted capricious.

Some days later, meeting Lady Somerville at a ball, she was delighted to present the artist to her.

"Lady Somerville, allow me to introduce Mr. Paul Smith: our collaborateur, you know, in the tableaux."

Lady Somerville acknowledged the introduction by a slight bow.

"May I have the honour of the next valse?" Paul asked, eagerly.

"Thank you, I never valse."

The answer was not encouraging, and the tone still less so, but the voice was wonderfully sweet.

"The next quadrille?"

"I am engaged."

"The lancers?"

She shook her head and turned away.

"Have you no dance to give me?" he persisted.

"I am afraid not," she answered carelessly enough, smiling the while upon a gentleman evidently seeking to make his way to her through the crowd. As he approached, Paul recognised Lord Duncan Glenholm. Claiming his dance, he led her away with empressment to a quadrille just forming.

Anxiously and enviously, Paul watched the two. A well matched couple; she, leaning on his arm with willowy, bending grace; he, tall, fair, and broad-shouldered: a fine type of power and strength that could not but find favour in the artist's eye. This then, was fortune's favourite, the man who had won the wealthy widow.

He was in no mood to dance. The discovery that Lady Somerville was the fair unknown had been a blow to any hope he might have had of winning the one woman who realised his ideal of grace and beauty. Less rich, less courted, he might have had a chance; but now—his gaze followed her, he was wholly absorbed in watching every movement, every turn of the fair face, every glance of the wonderful eyes that never met his own. Was it chance or did she purposely avoid him?

He determined to be convinced. Henceforth, all his energies should be devoted to solving the enigma. Sphinx that she was, he would read and unravel the mystery. The rehearsals at Steynham House would be in his favour. Fervently he blessed Lady Steynham for casting him in the unimportant part of messenger in his picture with Lady Somerville.

However, he was doomed herein to disappointment, and had to await the eventful night.

In the meanwhile he sought her wherever she was likely to be met. Occasionally they passed in the Row, or he saw her driving or riding in the park; and he was fain to be content with the slightest of bows, or the very few words that politeness required in recognition, it might be, of some trifling service he was only too happy to render.

Had Lady Somerville desired to make him more completely her slave, she could not have acted with greater judgment. The chains of



her fascination, slight in the beginning, were weighing on him and binding him, a willing captive at her feet. Nettled and fascinated, Paul Smith's admiration was rapidly drifting into passionate and intense love, and the one object of his hitherto objectless life was to win her affection.

The fête at Steynham house came off in due time. The daily papers called it "a colossal success," and gave unmitigated praise to the three tableaux preceding the ball.

"King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid," the first given, was remarkably successful in reproducing the elaborate detail of the celebrated picture; and after the curtain had risen and fallen twice upon it, was followed by Millais' "Huguenots."

Lady Steynham had secured Mr. Beauchamp, a bachelor and a wealthy brewer, as an eligible representative of her niece's lover; trusting to his fortune to make up for any shortcomings. Lady May looked the part to perfection. The ensemble was enhanced by real ivy trailing over the well imitated wall, and the flaming nasturtium and bluebell.

The gem of the evening was undeniably the last—"Love Tokens," by the fashionable and popular artist, Paul Smith, in which, he himself appeared as the king's messenger, and the beautiful Lady Somerville as the ill-starred Françoise. Upon the black draperies of the background, the masses of ruddy, golden hair shone out in a flood of glory, as, with imperious gesture, she points to a glittering heap of broken jewels at her feet, the abject messenger of the king cowering beneath the outraged woman's scorn.

Now, and not until now, had Paul realised the truth. Seeing her in the well-remembered costume, it flashed upon him Lady Somerville and Isabel Gray were one and the same—the model, whose love and devotion he had lost; he would not admit, even to himself, that he had despised it. His eyes met hers with a look of burning love. At that look of recognition hers fell, the colour rose ominously in her pale cheeks, and as suddenly faded away; her lips parted in a faint sigh. Swaying forward, she would have fallen, but for Paul, who rushed with outstretched arms to save her.

To the loud applause succeeded a sudden hush. The curtain was dropped. Lady Steynham was quickly on the scene; promptly giving the necessary directions. The guests were reassured, Lady Somerville's faintness attributed to the heat, and after a few moments, the curtain rose again upon the interrupted tableau.

Paul longed to be alone with her. His heart was beating high with hopes of forgiveness: surely she could not be indifferent to the lover of her youth. Would the curtain never drop! At last, amid the sound of deafening applause, it fell; the tableaux were over; he was free to seek her. She did not enter the ball-room, but eluded him, and he and the admiring spectators looked for her in vain.

The following day Lady Somerville's house was besieged by callers : all London left cards of inquiry.

Among others, Paul Smith, who, hearing she was better, ventured to call again later in the afternoon. He was told, "Her ladyship had left town."

## VI.

ISABEL had sought safety in flight. Why? He had discovered her secret. What then? As he asked himself, a smile flitted across his face. She was afraid. Of whom? Herself!

Paul Smith had recognised her, and the selfsame moment she had discovered the secret of her love. She fled, carrying with her, indeed, the vision of revenge she had planned, overwhelmed in the joy that filled her heart. She was but a loving, pitiful woman, incapable of the scornful rejection of the love she longed for and which was now humbly laid at her feet, to be refused—rejected. Trembling for herself and her weakness, she fled; but only to return. Yearning to see him again, after some days' wearying, she plunged once more into the gaieties of town.

Her well known equipage and lovely face were seen in the park. And although she fought against her love and denied herself to Paul, invariably being "not at home" to him, a day came when she could no longer refuse the interview he asked. In answer to his letter he was ushered into a prettily furnished room. Through a glass door, opening upon a small garden, he saw Isabel's slender figure in softly falling white drapery. With slightly heightened colour, she entered and greeted him.

There was a moment of embarrassing silence. She was the first to recover her composure, as seeking to release her hand from his, she murmured :

"Mr. Smith, I hope ——"

What she hoped, he never asked. Covering the hand he held imprisoned in his own with kisses, he, in burning words, besought her forgiveness, and more than that, her love.

With a fluttering movement, she sought to withdraw her hand from his firm grasp, then suddenly she let it lie passive in his. He looked up. The shadow of a smile dimpled the corners of her mouth, as she softly uttered : "This to me, the despised model!"

Encouraged by the tone of her voice he attempted to fold her in his loving arms; but with a forbidding gesture she drew back.

"Isabel, don't send me away from you! All these long years I have wanted you, and my lonely heart has ached for the love that was lost to me. And now that I am more worthy of you—now—you will not refuse to let me call you mine?"

"Mr. Smith, you are paying me the highest compliment in offering me the hand and heart you refused to Isabel Gray. You can more fittingly bestow it on Lord Somerville's widow: I shall not disgrace

you as a wife. Hush!" she continued, as he sought to interrupt her. "Hear me out. That day—so long ago—I called at the studio, and accidentally overheard your conversation with Hugo Somerville. Determined that you should not have the chance of spoiling your life by marrying me, I went away and changed my address. Your friend found me out, and by his goodness and chivalry won me.—And now it may be as well to be clear upon one point, an important one. That is, that, wealthy as I am reputed, in marrying again, the only fortune I bring my husband is—myself, Isabel Somerville, née Gray. The Somerville estates and moneys pass from my hands, leaving them empty."

With a pretty and beseeching gesture, she opened her hands towards him, drawing them back hastily as he stretched out his own.

"I am sure you do not care for a penniless bride, any more than I care to be a burden to the man I may wish to marry."

Again she held out her hand, with quiet dignity, saying only the words "Good-bye."

How would he bear the ordeal, she asked herself. To her intense joy, his countenance remained unchanged, he betrayed no disappointment. He was prepared to make any sacrifice to win her. Claspings her hand in both his own, he answered her Good-bye.

"Better so, my darling; I want you, yourself, not your surroundings. Thank Heaven, I have more than enough for both, and you shall never miss the luxuries which have been yours. You shall never regret giving yourself to me. I would rather you owed something to me, Isabel."

His voice was earnest and truthful, and his eyes met hers with a trusting look.

With a happy sigh, she laid her hand caressingly upon his. A shadow crossed his face as his glance fell upon the wedding-ring encircling her slender finger. It was but a momentary pang. Had she seen it, he asked himself on his homeward way, as he lived the happy hour he had passed with her over and over again. At her earnest entreaty, he had reluctantly left her, to return again in the evening. And she was alone, once more, with her new happiness; alone, but never to feel lonely again.

Face to face with a future dawning afresh from out the dim yet unforgotten past. The past! As the words rose to her lips she shivered; the look of aversion he had cast upon her wedding-ring, the symbol of another's love, pleaded for this last sacrifice. Had she not given away her heart, had she not promised her hand? Slowly she drew off the golden token of love placed there by the hand of a loving husband now dead, and taking a key from a chain she always wore, she opened an ebony and ivory inlaid cabinet, and pressing a spring, disclosed a deep drawer behind a recess. Kissing the little ring sadly and pitifully, she dropped it in.

It fell upon a sealed letter. She started nervously as the ghost of

the past confronted her. No need to read again the well remembered superscription: "To my dear wife, on the day she accepts another's love, or on her thirtieth birthday."

Her hand shakes, the blood flames across her face and fades away, leaving her, if possible, whiter than before. Reverently, she breaks the seal.

A message of a mighty love has followed her from beyond the grave. Through a haze of blinding tears, she reads his wish for her happiness, begging her to accept the sum of £40,000 he bequeaths to her, as a token of his love. For further particulars he refers her to his solicitors.

Unselfish Hugo! His love had watched over her in her loneliness and ignorance of the world; and in depriving her of the golden bait of a fortune, he had tested the disinterestedness of her lover.

Was it surprising that pride in that lover, who had borne the test nobly, should mingle in the tribute of gratitude she paid to her husband's memory?

When she again met her accepted lover, her eyes were dim with hushed tears, as in silence she put Hugo's letter into his hands.

Paul started, and deeply moved, exclaimed: "How generous!" Then seeing the tears in her eyes, he kissed them away, adding: "I will be as good to you as he was, my darling; better, I could not be."



#### A FLOWER SONG.

ALL along the crowded street,  
Where the people jostle,  
Hear her call her nosegays sweet,  
Clearer than the throstle.  
"Brisk and gay, at break o' day,  
Earlier risen than any,  
From the hills and far away—  
Country flowers, a penny!"

She has cheeks and lips of red,  
Bonny country roses;  
While town ladies lay abed  
She was picking posies.  
Loud and clear, all the year,  
Sign of hope to many,  
See, she brings the country near—  
"Buy my flowers, a penny!"

"Here are violets for your breast,  
Winter time is over!  
Daffodils with golden crest,  
Pansies for the lover!  
As for me, of low degree,  
Blyther I than any;  
Give me cowslips o' the lea—  
Country flowers, a penny!"

All along the crowded ways  
Of the grimy city,  
Comes a whiff of country days,  
Comes a rush of pity!  
Though the town grind us down,  
Here's delight for many;  
God be thanked for summer's crown,  
"Buy my flowers, a penny!"

G. B. STUART.

## UNDER NORTHERN SKIES.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," &c.

ONE of the most popular and pleasant excursions round about Stockholm takes you to Mariefred and the ancient castle of Gripsholm : the former so called after a fifteenth century monastery dedicated to the Virgin. Grip is Swedish for vulture, and the very sound of Gripsholm suggests a wild, wooded place, given up to dark, solitary forests, haunted by birds of prey, and rock-bound shores washed by troubled waters. Such it may have been in ages past, but such it is no longer.

These waters were not troubled the day we paid them our visit, though winds blew cold and discoursed eloquently of the North Pole. Great coats were a painful necessity, in spite of sunshine. We had the upper deck to ourselves, and braved the chilling blast under the lee of the captain's cabin and the steering box. On the main deck and in the saloon's yet deeper depth, people of all nations sat and shivered, and shouted at each other in the shrill tones so dear to foreigners. All seemed to possess one link in common—a red Baedeker. Swedes, French, German, Spanish, and one or two English—all had a Baedeker. Like the sign of the Red Cross to the ancient crusader, so is Baedeker to modern tourists. And are they not also crusaders in their way ; waging war upon all countries ; not in the cause of religion, or freedom, or art ; not always for love of nature ; but too often following each other like a flock of sheep for the sake of excitement and imitation ?

We, too, should have had a Baedeker no doubt, but there had not been one left on English or foreign soil. The tourist army of locusts had gone before and devoured them all. "Another edition in two months," was the invariable reply, in tones which seemed to say that for the sake of Baedeker it was well worth delaying one's journey. To-day there was quite a small edition on board, and the red covers were lying about the decks bright as poppies in a cornfield. Great coats and furs were at a premium, for the Swedes wrap up long before an Englishman dreams of doing so. The variable temperature perhaps gives them a sufficient reason ; and the Frenchman's satirical definition that the climate is eight months winter and four months cold weather has some truth in it also. No matter how hot and calm it might be in Stockholm, the moment we found ourselves on Lake Malaren a cold and cruel wind sprang up to mar its beauties. It seemed to blow from all quarters, swirl round all the islands, rush up all the arms and inlets, sigh and sigh amongst the forest trees, hover about our little steamer with shrieks and moanings, like

"The wail of lost souls that in vain  
Seek rest from their pain."



And yet every succeeding visit appeared to disclose fresh beauties,



GRIPSHOLM.

unfold new points of interest. Long shore lines and undulations, sweeping round in curves, stretching out in wooded tongues. Occasional mansions, surrounded by park-like lawns and backed by an endless extent of forest. On a height, wooded, wild and tangled, an old, deep red, picturesque windmill was sharply outlined by the background of the blue, clear summer sky, with sails that were never meant to turn, and walls that never vibrated to the sound of the grindstone. Built only for effect, it was a somewhat childish idea, yet conduced by the additional tone and interest it threw

over these romantic shores. On every side the aspect of the lake

is diversified with a multitude of islands. There are channels so numerous and intricate that to steer one's course amongst them would seem the lesson of a lifetime. Forests abound. More than half Sweden is forest-land. Wild, beautiful forests, where you may revel in endless solitudes, in the song of the birds, the murmur of running streams, the fine fresh air of heaven, far from the haunts of men, the roar of cities. Down that channel to the left, the banks on either side lined with whispering and waving woods, you presently come to Sodertelje and all the picturesque life of the little town. Old women besiege you with cakes and cherries, make a small fortune and get excited with prosperity whilst the boat is being piloted through the locks. Just beyond this you gain your first experience of the Gotha canal.

But bear to the right, as we did to-day, and you will soon come to a broad, beautiful bay, crowned by the small town of Mariefred, a church and quiet graveyard overshadowing the landing-stage. On the opposite shore rises the imposing castle of Gripsholm, with its four unequal brick towers and their vane-pointed domes.

In this sheltered bay it is warm and pleasant. The icy wind gains no entrance here; one feels in paradise. Great coats and furs are discarded and given over to the care of the fat, good-looking, good-natured stewardess. The captain speaks excellent English, is agreeable and attentive, as if to do his best for you were not only his duty but his delight.

"Often as I have been to Mariefred," said he, "I have never yet seen Gripsholm. But the day is so fine and we have so much time before us that I shall pay it my first visit." We upheld him in this laudable determination. "Dinner on board after we start again," he added. "There is an inn at Mariefred, but I don't think you would like it." We assured him that dinner on board and on deck had charms above and beyond the close confinement of the most illustrious restaurant, or of the Grand Hotel itself.

Everyone filed off in detachments, each to his own, to rally under the castle roof. The most conspicuous member of the cavalcade was, of course, an English spinster of uncertain age and severe aspect, who, in blue spectacles, a mushroom hat and a crinoline, looked as if her mission was to uphold the traditions of a past generation.

The walk led through the hilly churchyard and the small town, quiet and unpretending as an abandoned village. Rows of straight, deserted streets, looking very much like a huge toy set out for a child's amusement, rather than a habitation for the sons of men. Houses built of wood, painted many colours, white and yellow especially: none of them more than two stories high, many of one floor only, like lengthened bungalows. Windows, clean-curtained and carefully kept, were adorned with flourishing plants, evidently esteemed. The place was absolutely deserted; life seemed stagnant.

Grass grew in the streets. Where were all the inhabitants, and what doing? How did they pass their existence, earn their daily bread?

We were a hundred yards or so behind the pilgrims, who, straggling on in front, awoke echoes in the quiet thoroughfares but no manner of responsive excitement. No face came to any window; no bright eyes or maiden's curious gaze added to the beauty of blooms and flowers. Windows remained undisturbed, curtains undrawn.

"Ah! parais à ta fenêtre,  
Qu'un doux regard de tes beaux yeux  
En mon âme pénètre,  
Et m'entr'ouvre les cieux!"

In vain we offered up silent serenades. Mesmeric influence, that loadstone of sentiment, had apparently no place in the short and simple annals of the people of Mariefred. None rushed to their doors to gaze after the retreating army. The inhabitants seemed a race apart, a law unto themselves. Perhaps they turned day into night, and were plunged in dreamland. The monastery of St. Mary itself, in its most cloistered days, could not have appeared more dead to the world.

Out of the village into an avenue of trees, through which one caught glimpses of domes and turrets: a short, shaded walk. Near the castle the trees spread out into small woods and shrubberies. Gardens flourished without the walls, flower beds with large pansies delicate as a butterfly's wing, well-kept paths, seats cunningly secluded. A few feet from the castle stretched the lovely waters of the lake. You might stand upon the small landing pier and let the ripples flash about you. Across there, a very short distance compared with the round we had made, the village slept in peace, the church steeple pointed to the blue ethereal sky, the hands of the church clock slowly told the passing moments.

An arched gateway admitted us into a courtyard, quaint, irregular, brick-built, gray and sombre, yet formidable looking as became an ancient castle which has taken part in the history of Sweden, has sheltered kings, entertained them, imprisoned them. It began its career in the far-off ages, but seems to have first become of importance about the fourteenth century, when Bo Jonsson Grip, in the days of King Albert of Sweden, gave it the name it has since retained. Then it was rebuilt by Gustavus Vasa, who made of it a more picturesque and perfect building than it is to-day, with slanting roofs that harmonised with the towers.

At the same time, Gustavus Vasa, active and energetic, fighting with the world, and playing his full part in the battle of life, was no friend to cloistered monks. He rebuilt and fortified the castle, but he demolished the monastery. It may be that he gave the monks the option of transferring themselves to the castle, changing an inward and spiritual warfare for the more outward and visible sign of the temporal.

But if they accepted the offer, doffed the monk's cowl for the soldier's helmet, laid aside pruning hooks for spears, history is silent upon the subject. History is not always silent or discreet; does not always bear out the maxim the monks themselves would perhaps have been the first to charge upon her: *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*.

In this castle, Eric XIV., son of the great Gustavus Vasa, kept his brother John a prisoner in a small turret room, a narrow passage encircling it the only change allowed him for air and exercise. Here he might walk round and round in endless monotony, returning always to the same point, now and then looking out upon the world and sighing for freedom. His time came. He escaped, and eventually deposed his brother, who in his turn became a prisoner, went insane, and was put to death by John, with a revenge that was evidently deep and lasting. At Gripsholm, too, in 1809, Gustavus IV. signed his abdication.

Thus Gripsholm has had vicissitudes, seen changes within and without her walls. For the present she has sunk into a state of well-earned repose. Her life is calm and uneventful; her peace disturbed only by such inroads as we have under contemplation.

The irregular courtyard, with its round massive tower and brick walls, was imposing, almost mediæval. Two cannon were before it with mouths pointed, as if asking, like sentinels, whether you were friend or foe. One is called the *boar*, the other the *sow*, names too unromantic and undignified for such an atmosphere. On the walls were crests and coat of arms, so that the courtyard looked heraldic as well as military. It was the most imposing bit in all the building.

Within, it might be called historical. Many of the rooms were extremely interesting; fitted up—some of them scantily enough—with mediæval furniture and tapestry, ancient objects of glass and silver, antique cabinets, carved and jewelled, and ivory images that might have adorned some pagan shrine. But if some of the rooms were barely furnished, the walls amply made up for any deficiency. They were lined with historical portraits to the number of some 2,000, many of them of the greatest interest. Some had been painted, and well painted, by the unhappy Eric XIV. There were sovereigns and personages of all nations. Eric himself, and his father, Gustavus Vasa; Catherine de Medici, with an expression worthy of her character; Mary of Scotland, lovely and bewitching; Henry VIII., in great breadth and boldness.

The captain of the steamer was standing beside us, greatly admiring the substantial proportions of this portly monarch. But when we informed him, by a slip of the tongue, that he had had eight wives, his admiration knew no bounds. Then, feeling it a positive duty to the shade of the bluff old king and to history, to withdraw the surplus consorts, it was plainly visible that King Harry went down at least twenty-five per cent in the good skipper's estimation.

Some of the rooms were gloomy for want of light, often admitted

through small latticed windows and tinted glass. Low ceilings, with great beams running across them, had some of these rooms; immense fireplaces where you might roast an ox or conceal a company of soldiers. But everything was interesting, the portraits alone were worthy, not one visit, but many.

A staircase, not very beautiful, but very ancient, with shallow steps of dark oak and quaint old balustrades, led upwards to the room so long a melancholy prison, and round which still seems to hang a profound melancholy, as if the ghost of the insane and murdered Eric haunted its old quarters and charged the atmosphere. Yet he was not put to death here. Two inquisitive German fraus—with high cheek-bones, loud voices, and determined wills: these things generally go together—began searching the fireplace in the angle of the room, raking amongst the ashes, the dust and fragments of mortar dislodged by time and weather—for all the world like a couple of that extinct race, the old Paris chiffoniers. Whether searching for hidden autographs, or the Philosopher's Stone, or a skull and cross-bones to carry off by way of lively remembrance; or whether the insane spirit of the luckless Eric had seized upon them; no one knew. They were very excited and had to be removed by strong words of persuasion.

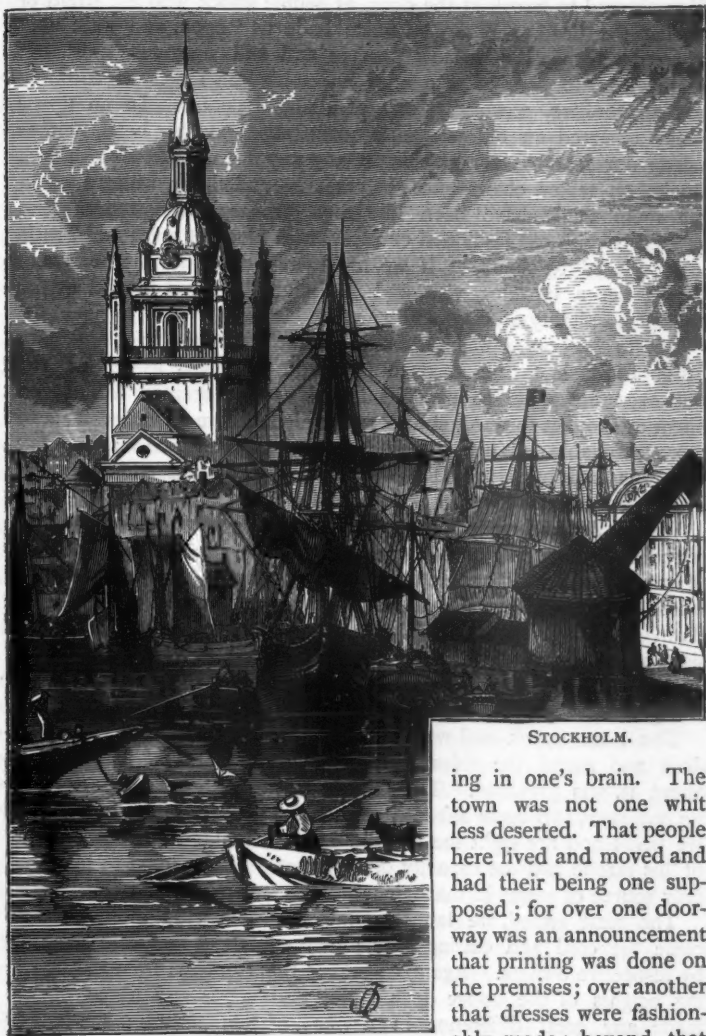
From grave to gay.—Within a few feet was the theatre built by the father of the unpopular Gustavus IV., in whose plays the king himself often took part. It was dark and sombre. Empty benches seemed peopled with phantoms of a courtly mob; boards echoed to the footsteps of a dead and gone monarch, frivolous and foolish, on whom the cares of an empire sat far too lightly. It was the saddest room in the castle; more sad than the gloomy prison itself. We were glad to leave it and presently find ourselves in the open air and the healthier influences without the castle walls.

The pilgrims had scattered. Every one had gone his own way. We had the walks, and the flowers, and the old grey walls of the irregular pentagonal building, with its unequal towers, to ourselves. It was a very lovely and romantic spot. The castle stood on a neck of land, almost surrounded by water. It rose above the trees in dignity and solitude, somewhat marred by a few modern buildings and dependencies added to it from time to time. Land stretched out in every direction, points opposing each other on the lake, wider waters beyond, with small islands that here and there rose like emeralds in a silver setting.

The hour for reassembling was still distant. We sat upon the landing stage and took our fill of all this beauty; enjoyed the close view of the romantic castle while its influence was yet upon us, and its portraits seem to gaze with a thousand eyes full of the Eastern warning: This also shall pass away. On the opposite shore was the steamer, quietly waiting the hour to strike from the church tower that overshadowed it. When that hour approached we wended our way



back to the little town, full of strange thoughts of what we had seen, pictures of past lives and histories taking fantastic form and colour-



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ing in one's brain. The town was not one whit less deserted. That people here lived and moved and had their being one supposed ; for over one doorway was an announcement that printing was done on the premises ; over another that dresses were fashionably made ; beyond, that

books were bound ; yet further, that books were sold. But nowhere was any creature visible. And when we came to the bookseller's announcement, E. suggested that a small historical account of Gripsholm, if any existed, would not be a bad investment.

But the door was closed. There were flowers in the windows guarded by spotless muslin, but no sign anywhere of books or people. We ventured to knock at the door, as people knock who are afraid of waking the dead. A far off voice bade us "open and walk up." We entered upon a narrow passage and still narrower staircase: narrow even for sons of men after Pharaoh's lean kine. It certainly was a primitive, unworldly way of doing business. In an upper room appeared an old woman, a quaint cap upon her head, neither asleep nor inactive, nor looking in any way separate from mankind. Books on tables, chairs and shelves, surrounded her, without which the room would have been like any ordinary sitting-room. She greeted us with old fashioned courtesy, with pleasant voice and gentle look; placed us chairs, as if we had merely done her the honour of paying her a morning visit, and she might be about to offer us the ancient hospitality of cake and wine.

But to her there was system and order in all this chaos and confusion of books. She at once produced what was asked for, and was even not quite so unsophisticated as she seemed, for of two histories brought forward, she recommended the more expensive and more profitable. When it had been bought and paid for, one felt that this had been no mere sale and barter transaction, but an interchange of civilities, an exchange of favours.

We left her and made way towards the steamer, whose whistle had sounded and whose first bell was ringing a wild peal. And—wonder of wonders—a well appointed carriage and pair, with a coachman whose uniform as usual was all pipstems and tassels, came tearing down towards the boat with a passenger and a portmanteau: the one sign of animation we had seen in the streets of Mariefred. This had mysteriously appeared out of the country from unknown shades and groves, to which it returned.

The hour struck and we departed. Awnings had been spread on deck and round the sides, and a feast, with no Barmecide element about it, was prepared. The captain was very animated about what he had seen, and again asked if we could positively assure him it was six wives and not eight the fine old king had taken to the splendour of his throne and the capacity of his heart. This seemed to him the only source of regret in that fair morning's experience and pilgrimage.

The feast ended, we launched into the lake's wide waters. Back came the cold and cutting wind; great coats and furs were claimed by respective owners. Again we braved the elements from the freezing heights of the upper deck. Not that upper and lower decks made any great difference in degrees of temperature; the wind searched and found out all alike; and as E. alliteratively said, in words worthy of a Laureate:

"Beaux, belles, and Baedekers, baffled by briny breezes,  
Sat shivering o'er Swedish streams, suppressing sneezes."

But the wind gained the day, and presently the decks were deserted

for the cabin, which must have been terribly stuffy, cribbed confined, by the time the towers of Stockholm opened up and we came to an anchor.

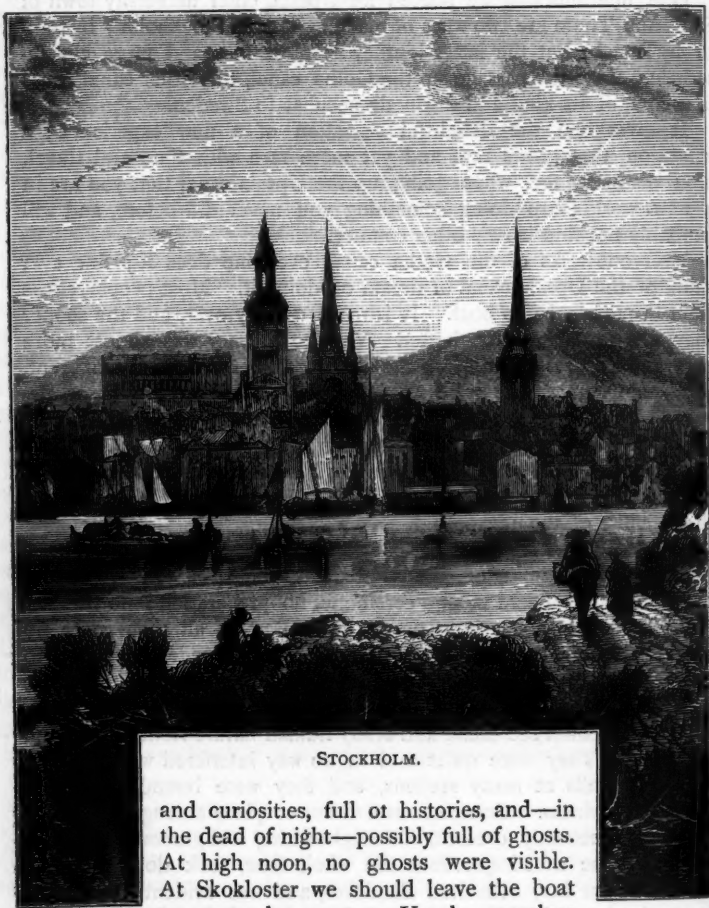
One fine morning we started for Upsala, chief university town of Sweden. There are two ways of reaching it from Stockholm; by train or by canal; but the latter journey is pleasanter and more characteristic. Like the passage up the Gotha canal, this other canal route is unique of its kind and distinctly peculiar to Sweden.

It gives one the delightful sensation of a new experience; a sensation that grows rare and yet more rare with time and travel. You distinctly feel when going up the Upsala canal that you are in a new world; are doing something you never did before, and will probably not find in any other country.

Everyone talks of the Gotha canal, everyone does it; few ever think of the Upsala canal or dream of doing it. Most people chose train in preference to boat. It is more quickly over, and the sooner they get to Upsala the better. Yet the journey was almost more enjoyable than the journey up the Gotha canal. It was very different, less important; there were no interesting locks to mount or descend; there was no golden-haired lady on board to dazzle us with her charms and divide our attention with passing scenes; there were no midnight experiences on dark mysterious lakes, no walks under the stars through avenues of splendid beeches. But there was the pleasure of the unexpected.

We had heard nothing of this canal journey; its praises had not been sung as those of the Gotha. Anticipating little, we received much. There was no ceremony, no preparation; no troublesome hours for meals long drawn out. Best of all there were no tourists. With the exception of a few pleasant Swedes, we had it to ourselves. There were more second-class passengers, but they were forward on a lower deck and were rather an advantage than otherwise. One could see them, and study human nature from an edifying elevation. They were quiet and in no way interfered with anyone. The boat calls at many stations, and they were bound to one or other on business. Conspicuous and out of place amongst them was a lady, coquettishly dressed, with tight-fitting kid gloves and a lace parasol. She asked questions the whole time, took down answers, looked about her, consulted Baedeker, and was evidently writing a guide book on her own account. It ought to have been intelligent by reason of her expression and manner; exhaustive from the amount of pains she took to gather information. She was travelling under the protection of an attentive husband, who seemed very proud of her; sharpened her pencils, referred to her book, held her parasol, generally fetched and carried for her, like any gallant of high degree. He was evidently very much her inferior, but badly as nature had matched them, they were a devoted pair.

We had left Stockholm in the early morning. The day fortunately was bright and warm, for the journey in bad weather would have turned all our best to worst, all our sweet to bitter. We were to halt at Skokloster: an old castle passed on the way, full of wonders



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and curiosities, full of histories, and—in the dead of night—possibly full of ghosts. At high noon, no ghosts were visible. At Skokloster we should leave the boat to go on her way to Upsala, ourselves

taking a small steamer some hours later on, which happened to run that day. This little steamer proved nothing more than a launch, and in rough or cold weather must be sufficient penance to expiate many sins.

We started from the Riddarholm, where almost everything does start in Stockholm, except the small local steamers. For a short time we ploughed the waters of the Malar Lake, through scenes now

grown familiar, but never wearisome. Soon we turned sharply to the right, into narrower and unknown waters and scenery of a new description. The wooded luxuriance of the lake gave place to long stretches of marshy ground. Again fields, evidently cultivated at great pains, were backed by wooded hills and enlivened by occasional farm-houses. Waters were often shallow and narrow, and we plunged into great reeds and rushes with a delightful swish that is nothing less than one of nature's many pastoral symphonies, bracing up heart and soul with a feeling of purest ecstasy. Why have the simplest things often so great a power to charm? The bulrushes were, some of them, ten and twelve feet high, and at one station we shipped a dried bundle of them, so tall as to excite universal curiosity and admiration.

Outside one narrow channel, which had sharp turns and twisted like a writhing snake, we had to wait while a dozen barges passed us in procession, towed by a small toy tug. They were attached to each other "in linked harmony," one man to each barge, and the procession seemed as long as a Lord Mayor's show, and far more interesting. Far more beautiful, too, the surroundings. We waited in the midst of the rushes, beside a wide stretch of fields where labourers, men and women, reaping and gathering, stopped their work to look at us, sharpened their scythes, and rested in the sunshine. To the left, divided only by the narrow water from the flat fields, was the loveliest, wildest, most flower-gemmed copse imaginable, with lights and shadows, gleams and glimpses of sunshine, rustling and murmuring trees full of Nature's tones and harmonies. Past this copse, gliding through the water, one after the other at measured distances, came the red barges, completing a singular and very enchanting picture.

We took our turn when the passage was clear, and copse and fields passed out of sight, and the reapers reaping broke out into a wild Swedish chorus which came after us as a parting serenade—rang out joyously upon the air, and seemed to keep rhythm to their scythes.

The boat called at many places, passed into many waters. At every station there was an exchange of passengers, chiefly of the second class. Many were peasants dressed in their best: such ordinary costumes as might be seen in any part of England. The difference was in people and tongue.

Once, passing from a narrow channel into wider waters, where the shores were broken and diversified, and small creeks, with which we had nothing to do, ran up into the land far away out of sight, we came to the very prettiest and most delightful spot yet seen in Sweden. A small town sleeping in full sunshine on the sloping shores of the lake. Houses of many colours rose one behind another, separated by the narrow creek from richly wooded heights and undulations.

On the small landing stage a group awaited our arrival, one solitary passenger was taken on board, and a small cloud of handkerchiefs waved him farewell.



We longed to leave the steamer and explore this lovely spot : but to yield to such temptations in travelling would be to end all plans and all time. Those to whom days and months and all places are alike, may make use of unexpected discoveries, break the thread of their arrangements and take it up again at pleasure. This forms the true delight of travelling ; removes all that is stereotyped and conventional ; often yields adventures which break the monotony of days that might otherwise succeed and resemble each other only too closely ; leads to scenes unheard of, unrecorded, but not the less beautiful for that reason. It is the fatality of life, the contradiction of human nature, that as a rule those to whom such things are possible are wanting in the spirit of enterprise, whilst to those who would make use of every opportunity time and circumstance are denied.

This little place was Sigtuna, the ancient pagan capital of Sweden, which had to give place to Upsala and Stockholm. Founded in the early ages, once large and prosperous, it is now little more than a village, with about five hundred inhabitants, and a few antiquarian ruins to tell of the past. Dead and gone and forgotten is all its ancient prosperity, and happily no one is left to mourn the change. Centuries have rolled away since it fell from its high estate ; generations have succeeded to a new order of things, than which they knew no other. A small rural district is all that it now can write itself, but neither time nor chance, nor man nor decree, has been able to take from its beauty. Never could it have been more lovely than now, overlooking those sparkling waters that beat against its rocks, surrounded by endless forests : a background of wooded undulations, rich and dark, and fringed against the far-off, clear blue sky.

After this, long, straight and more monotonous grew the shores, and in about half an hour the imposing towers of Skokloster, where the water was widest, rose above the surrounding trees and announced the break in our journey.

The stations between this and Stockholm had been too insignificant to own a pier. The steamer in sight, a small boat had shot out from the shore, a rope was thrown to it, a ladder put over the side, and passengers scrambled in or out, often just escaping a cold plunge into the lake. But at Skokloster a landing-stage enabled those who left to walk on shore. It was about half-past twelve : we had been three hours and a half on board. The journey had been singular, and missing it we should have missed one of our pleasantest days in Sweden.

The word Skokloster means "Forest Convent," and in the old monastic days no doubt the place merited its name. It now belongs to Count Brahe, a descendant of Tycho Brahe, the astronomer. Gustavus Vasa put an end to the Cistercian convent as he did to the monastery of Mariefred ; the building in time partially or wholly disappeared, and the present one rose in its stead. It is full of treasures

and curiosities, many of them collected during the Thirty Years' War. The custodian met us at the pier, and it was amusing to find him far too consequential to carry our hand-bag, though quite ready to accept a fee later on for showing us over the château—certainly well earned by his civility during the inspection.

The way from the pier led uphill, under the grateful shade of trees; for, coming off the water, air and sun suddenly seemed seven times heated. A hundred yards or so of gradual ascent and we stood before the massive, imposing building, quadrangular in form, with four octogan towers surmounted by black cupolas and small turrets. Four long straight rows of stiff windows, one above another, stared at us like countless eyes in the white walls, gloomy and sombre. A cracked bell chimed the hours with a melancholy tongue of iron, that seemed to say to the listener, in the words of the monks of La Trappe, and in the midst of a profound solitude and silence: "Memento Mori."

The inspection commenced with the courtyard, large, silent and depressing, in which surely the sun never penetrated. We were alone, not one of a crowd, as at Gripsholm. And here there was no portrait of a fine old English king to dazzle a worthy skipper with admiration, and, as it seemed, spur him on to go and do likewise. But perhaps we wronged him.

Large, white-washed corridors ran round the quadrangle, and proverbs of wit and wisdom, all of a thoughtful and elevating tendency, were written upon the walls in many languages and singular fashion. The rooms, large and well-proportioned, contained many rare curiosities. Collections of jewels and plate, objects of priceless and historical value, cabinets wonderfully inlaid, antique furniture, ancient chimney pieces large and splendidly carved, pictures and portraits; and, not least of all, a collection of some of the most wonderful and beautiful tapestry in existence. Some of the ceilings, that of the principal drawing-room especially, were splendidly painted. Above, was a magnificent library of over twenty thousand volumes, many of them in white vellum bindings, dry, ancient, and apparently unused. It was a feast of reason and a flow of soul only to walk from case to case, classified and progressive, and read the titles where titles were. Equally splendid was the adjoining armoury, but suggestive of very different times and scenes: the knight of the sword contrasted with the knight of the pen; the two reposing side by side here in such harmony as surely never existed between them in life. The object of chief interest in the armoury was a wonderfully wrought shield by Benvenuto Cellini which belonged to the Emperor Charles V., and was taken at Prague. The custodian declared that £20,000 had been lately offered for it, and refused.

In one of the turrets we came upon an unexpected prisoner. The room contained old relics, swords and guns, and clothes worn by a great man in battle. A little bird, with possibly a taste for antiquities,

had flown down the chimney, and was caught in its own trap. There it might have remained and in turn become an antiquity also, but for our visit. Windows were opened, and it soon found its way out, and was soaring over land and lake. We, too, longed for wings to do likewise. Who has not felt the longing, especially when listening to Shelley's lark, that for very happiness "soaring still doth sing?"

Our visit over, luncheon had to be thought of. One cannot live upon tapestry and beautiful objects. They are very interesting, but their inspection is terribly exhausting. We cannot live upon them—it is not so sure that one cannot die of them. There is no inn at Skokloster, and some of the dependents of the castle undertake to provide luncheon for visitors. The attendant led the way to some neat but humble rooms, and here they promised that in half an hour exhausted nature should be provided with food. There was a delicious vagueness as to the kind and measure of the supplies. We had visions of nectar and ambrosia.

To pass away the time, the custodian accompanied us to the church, which belonged to the original monastery and is interesting. Then he finally bowed himself out of our presence, and left us to wander at will about gardens and avenues. The clock with its melancholy voice struck two, and we hastened to obey the signal. The windows of the little room were open to the pure, warm air and rustling trees and bright blue sky: windows with deep old-fashioned casements, in which we sat and lounged with a feeling of intense, pleasurable restfulness after our late antiquarian feast; whilst a savoury smell, wafted up through an open doorway, announced a feast in which we devoutly hoped antiquity would have no part. A little maid waited upon us, and from regions unseen brought excellent supplies, if not precisely Olympian food; whilst all was served on the whitest of plain damask.

Altogether that visit to Skokloster was wonderfully pleasant; left behind it a feeling of temporary seclusion from the world; of wandering in unfrequented paths; of a château large and imposing if not strictly beautiful, and containing objects of rare interest. The little steamer was due at three o'clock, and when the hour sounded from the cracked and melancholy bell, we went down to the small landing-stage. Lake and opposite and surrounding shores were in full sunshine, but no boat was visible.

About half past three a black speck came into sight. Could this be the craft that was to have the honour of conveying us to Upsala? A thin line of smoke, rising upwards, and slightly troubling the clear sky, seemed to answer the question. It puffed on to a distant point on our side, and was lost in the shadow of the trees. On the opposite shore a red flag was suddenly hoisted, signal of distress or need. In a few minutes the boat darted across; and with the help of glasses one made out a small landing-stage, and a group of people in every attitude of expectation.

After that it made direct for our pier. A small boat, no bigger than a steam launch, not very clean, very little protected against wind and storm, altogether uncomfortable. We started, and in the warm, fine weather, enjoyed the novel experience.

The boat, calling at innumerable stations, made slow progress. Wherever she was wanted, up went a red flag, and away she darted, performing incessant zigzags, until we began to think that Upsala would never be reached that day. One distant station thought it unnecessary to run up the signal, and she passed on. Half-a-dozen passengers in waiting began frantic appeals, up went the tardy flag, back we had to put. Where did they all come from, these people? Where did these little landing stages lead to? What sort of settlements? What kind of people? What out-of-the-world lives did they live? For we never saw any houses: nothing but long unbroken stretches of wood and forest: apparently an uninhabited country, lonely and desolate. Nothing but these small landing stages here and there, to show that somewhere beyond those forests dwelt people who occasionally had need to communicate with the outer world.

The boat took an immense amount of luggage on board; cases empty and full; crates of beer bottles, proving that up here, at any rate, total abstinence and the blue ribbon found little favour. At one station there seemed to have been a general flitting. Three old ladies, a servant, beds, and sundry articles of household furniture. The old ladies had last instructions to deliver to those they left behind; extra cloaks had to be taken off or put on; long and tender embracings and partings: all in the most deliberate manner, whilst the boat waited in patience. At last the captain said he would go without them, and they made the final plunge on board rather than be separated from their beloved goods and chattels.

By degrees the little craft became crowded with people, choked with cargo. She grew low in the water, and one began to have visions of foundering, and a great splash, and a tragedy. There even came a time when the captain refused any more cargo: decks were full, and also the wooden roof or awning. By this time we were in the Upsala canal; narrow, rush-grown waters on a level with the banks: shores no longer wooded, but cleared, sometimes cultivated. Signs and sounds of life gradually awakened. Small houses, frequent landing stages, where flags were no longer needed. A peculiar tone about the landscape reminded one of the green meadows of Holland with their broad dykes and canals: for this canal was sometimes hardly broader than a dyke. It was extremely interesting, everything was so new and unfamiliar. But when three hours had passed away we were not sorry to approach Upsala. Moving on board was out of the question, breathing only just possible.

Finally, the banks rose on either side; streets; a long row of houses lining the canal. We were in Upsala; passing upwards to the landing stage. Warehouses, blacksmiths' shops, iron factories

dark and grimy gave place to quieter houses, clean and white. A weir in front of us, evidently not to be passed, and just on this side of it our landing stage.

The very first person on shore to greet our eyes was the second-class lady passenger who had been on board the first steamer, attended by her devoted husband. Her note book was conspicuous, but the lace parasol was nowhere. She still looked the essence of neatness; a comely woman who knew how to set herself off to the best advantage. She gave us an involuntary flash of recognition as we landed; then turned to her inferior half with a look of consternation, as if for once she had not seized her opportunity. "My beloved Theophilus," we heard her murmur, "this also we might have done—ought to have done!"

We heard no more, but went our way; a long line of houses to the right, trees and water to the left; a very picturesque scene. We enquired our way to the *Stadshotellet*: and looked about us to see how far the venerable and learned atmosphere of the university town had overshadowed place and people.



#### LOST LOVE.

MANY and many a day she sat  
On the swelling sands by the sea;  
Many and many a day she sighed:  
"Come back, oh, my love, to me!"  
And over the sea, to the far-off south,  
And out to the west looked she;  
And many and many a ship went by,  
But never again came he.

"Oh, fair and sweet were the words he spoke  
When he saw me first that day;  
Oh, he was the best and bravest man,  
And I could not say him nay.  
The fairest lover, the strongest man,  
And shun me all who may,  
He loved me well, and he loves me still,  
Far and far away."

But the warm days fled, and the leaves fell dead,  
And the winds swept over the sea;  
"Oh, wild, wild waves," in her grief she said,  
"Hide him for ever from me!"  
And the wild waves rose, and the wild, wild wind  
Blew out from the caves of the sea;  
A ship went down, and a man was lost—  
Bitterly then wept she.

A grave scooped out on the yellow sands,  
And a grave down under the sea—  
Two plighted spirits wander apart  
Till the end of the world shall be.

GEORGE COTTERELL.



## THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

UNDER the bare old trees, a grey light changing every resemblance of the past soft summer days, the two girls met unexpectedly. There was a bit of the wild common at Dunsfield, edged by a row of fine elms, which in summer listened to the love tales of youths and maidens ; but in winter few troubled their solitude. Two miles from any habitation, it was strange that this should be the selected walk of Norah Fitzgerald and her friend Lottie Maynes, neither of them lovers of black solitude, and neither expecting to meet the other.

There was embarrassment in the greeting. Norah's beautiful Irish face blushed as she recognised the quick, expressive countenance of her former school friend.

"Norah ! I did not know you were in the neighbourhood !"

"I am staying at the Browns'," responded the other.

"The Browns'!" repeated Lottie, drily. "Ah ! I remember ; one of the girls was at our school. Very heavy, very rich ; soap, isn't it?"

Lottie was little, lightly made, and with a face so full of intelligence you forgave its lack of beauty. She looked defiantly up into the good blue eyes of the lovely girl beside her, and something she saw there made the defiant look drop away. She said, uneasily :

"I beg your pardon, Norah. Are the reports we have heard true?"

"Quite true," said Norah, gravely.

"It—it seemed so impossible ! Forgive me ! I thought what we used to talk of at school would come to pass : and this instead of it ! It is past believing."

"You know nothing about it," said Norah, quickly. "It is better not to pursue the subject." And she would have passed on, but Lottie caught her hand.

"Norah, we have been fast friends for years ; do not let us part like this. I could not bear to think you fickle and mercenary."

"But you *do* think it," said Norah, proudly, a warm light shining in her face. "You believe me all that is worst."

"No, no, indeed I don't ! But when I knew you wished to marry your cousin in Limerick——"

"Hush !" cried the Irish girl, hastily. "I can't bear that *yet*."

And the impulsive hands were clasped together, as the girl looked sternly and drearily out over the gloomy common. There was silence for a minute, then Lottie said timidly :

"Will you come and see me, Norah, and talk it over?"

"It is a settled thing, Lottie, and needs no talking over. A good and worthy man is to be my husband—soon, very soon"—her voice trembled. "I'll see you *when I'm married*."

Just then there came jauntily along the path the figure of a middle-aged Irish gentleman. He wore a shooting suit, and an air of general self-satisfaction. When he beheld the two girls, a wary look passed over his face. Norah turned as he approached, murmuring :

"My father."

A genial smile beamed and a rich brogue answered :

"A friend, me darlin', in these lonely parts ! Introjuce me, I beg."

And forthwith Captain Fitzgerald was made known to Miss Maynes. Instinctively Lottie disliked the man, and she knew Norah had no mother.

"Do ye live near here ?" enquired the Captain, insinuatingly.

"Two miles off," said Lottie, quietly. "I want Norah to come and see me."

"Indeed ! and what a pleasure for her ! But we are off to London almost immediately. After a certain event, though, my daughter will be here altogether," he pursued, smilingly ; "and sure ye'll be capital neighbours."

Lottie Maynes bowed, but in some way felt it hard to speak. Captain Fitzgerald jauntily glanced at his watch.

"Time to go back, Norah. Sure there are more charming ladies invited to tea than any poor mortal man has the right to expect to see. Are you going to add to the group, Miss Maynes ?"

A slight raising of the head Lottie could not control, as she answered :

"I am returning to Holmwood at once." Then her eyes rested lingeringly on Norah as they took leave.

"No time to come and see me, Norah ?"

"Not yet," answered the girl, quickly. "We shall meet by-and-bye."

"Of coorse, of coorse !" genially responded the father, raising his hat, as his daughter slowly turned away with him.

What a wearied, plotting little brain was Lottie's as she walked fast home to her mother, whose bright, clever face looked across the cups and saucers, which were revealed by the firegleams to be rare and costly.

"At last, child ! The tea will be almost a syrup, through waiting for your ladyship."

Quickly Lottie threw off hat and jacket, coming to her low chair with so eager a look Mrs. Maynes (she was the Honourable Mrs. Maynes, reader, having that prefix to her name as the daughter of a good old Tory lord, still living) said anxiously :

"What has happened, Lottie ?"

"Oh, mamma! Poor Norah Fitzgerald *is* going to marry young Brown the soap-boiler, and I've seen her! She is staying with his father and mother."

A smile half sarcastic, half pitying, passed over the mother's face.

"He is very rich, Lottie. Her friends will count her fortunate!"

"But," demurred Lottie, vehemently, as she set down her cup and saucer with a little ring, "you saw her at Brussels—that beautiful, high-bred girl! And—and mother, you have seen Brown."

"Yes," said Mrs. Maynes quietly, "I have seen Arthur Brown. He is a quiet, honourable man. Why should you regret the match?"

Lottie laid her hands on her knees in desperation.

"Don't you see she loves her cousin, Brian O'Moore?"

"No, my dear; I can't see what I don't know anything about. Probably, if it was a boy and girl affection, they will be better off as it is. Irish love matches are seldom prudent."

"Oh, but mamma, you don't know anything yet!"

"Enlighten me, then."

"Well, Norah's mother died two years ago, leaving eight children."

"Poor things!"

"Norah was sixteen then, and she is the eldest. Her mother gave her leave to marry Brian, and it was only when her father saw Mr. Brown would marry her, any doubt came of it. I saw Brian once, but not to speak to, and it breaks my heart to think of that Brown in his place!"

"Hush, child! Have you seen the father?"

"Yes, to-day. He did not want Norah to be with me, I saw."

Mrs. Maynes pondered for a few minutes, and ended with a sigh.

"There is nothing we can do, Lottie, unless the girl herself asks us."

Lottie jumped up, radiant.

"Dear little clever mother! You mean you *will* help her if she needs it?"

"Not so fast, child! We have to hear what she needs first. Dear me, snow is falling! Ring for the shutters to be closed, and the fire made up."

That evening the widowed mother and Lottie sat listening to the silence. This very Irish sounding state of matters was literally the case; for whereas an hour before a bleak wind blew gustily round the house, making shutters, windows and doors crack and creak with sudden bursts, now an unnatural stillness prevailed.

"Dear me, the wind was better than this!" exclaimed Lottie, rising from her chair impatiently. "I must just look out at the snow."

"My dear Lottie," said Mrs. Maynes, shivering and drawing a shawl round her shoulders, "don't undo the shutters; you cannot possibly see anything. I shall go to bed directly after prayers. Ring for the servants."

Lottie drew back from the window, and rang the bell. Presently

the three servants entered. Holmwood was grander in recollections than present prosperity, and the widowed mistress lacked the retinue of domestics which had done much to lessen the income of her somewhat extravagant husband. After prayers, Hannah, the elderly house-keeper and maid combined, waited to assist Mrs. Maynes in gathering up her work, key-basket, &c.

"It's been a wild night, ma'am, and the snow is falling that thick and heavy! It'll be bad travelling for any poor soul!"

"Perhaps it will be warmer for the snow to-morrow. Come Lottie, Hannah is ready to put out the lamp."

The two other servants had gone to bed, and Mrs. Maynes lingered a moment in the lobby to say good-night to her daughter.

"Hark! what's that?" said Lottie, starting. A sound of the wire of the hall-door bell being pulled caught her quick ear. A second after, a quick peal rang out.

"What can it be?" whispered Mrs. Maynes, turning pale. Hannah looked down into the great dark hall by holding the flickering candle over the banisters.

"I'll go down and see," she said.

"Be careful, Hannah! don't undo a bolt until you know who it is."

"Never fear, ma'am. Just go into your room and don't catch cold."

"I'll come with you, Hannah," said Lottie.

"You'll just bide where you are, Miss Lottie," said the old woman in a determined voice, as she descended, candle in hand, the staircase over which Lottie eagerly leaned to listen.

"Who's there?" asked Hannah, in a commanding voice.

"A traveller who has lost his way," came the muffled answer.

"Dear me," nervously whispered Mrs. Maynes, "I hope she'll be careful!"

"We can't unbar to strangers this time of night," said Hannah.

"Sure I'm half dead with cold, and no christian can refuse shelter on a night like this!" said a voice with a strong brogue in it. Lottie descended a few stairs.

"Ask his name and where he was going, Hannah!" she whispered loudly.

"Will you say who you are, sir, and where you were going?" demanded the old servant.

"Brian O'Moore is my name, if I'm myself at all, and I was on my way to a place called Fleet-Hill to see a friend."

Hannah was totally unprepared for her next orders, received after a hurried whispering between mother and daughter.

"You may open the door, Hannah," said Mrs. Maynes, "and light the lamp in the drawing-room."

"Are you sure, ma'am?"

"Quite sure. We know of the gentleman."

Heavily the bolts grated back, the key turned, and a figure as white as a christmas cake slowly entered the dim hall. Hannah surveyed the visitor dubiously.

"I'm ashamed to bring all this snow in, but I've been for two hours wandering like a lost spirit over some bare bit of land."

"Never mind the snow, sir," said Hannah, mollified by the pleasant countenance revealed; "that common is a bad place of a dark night, and the shutters all shut here too!"

The old servant did not lead her guest to suppose that Holmwood was anything but brilliantly illuminated on winter nights! For economy's sake it was far otherwise. At last the embers of the drawing-room fire were cheered into a blaze, the lamp lit, and a pair of slippers found for the traveller. Then Mrs. Maynes descended, followed by her daughter.

The young Irishman bowed gratefully as the ladies entered.

"I am glad we are able to offer you a shelter this terrible night," said Mrs. Maynes, gently; "you had lost your way?"

"I had, madam—I am an entire stranger here, and took my directions for a five-mile walk at the station, without counting on a snow-storm. Am I far from Fleet Hill, can you tell me?"

"Mr. Brown's place?"

A dark frown gathered on the handsome face.

"Ay, Mr. Brown's place."

"It is three miles from here. You must have taken the wrong turning at the cross roads."

"Very like I did. Could I reach there to-night, think you?" asked the young man eagerly.

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Maynes, decidedly. "You will stay here to-night and can go to Mr. Brown's after breakfast."

"I am truly obliged to you, madam; but," hesitating, "I may miss some one I've come from Ireland to see—I may be too late."

"This person is Miss Norah Fitzgerald?" quietly conjectured Mrs. Maynes.

"You know her?" cried the young man, in delighted amazement.

"Ah, then, madam, you will help me to save her from misery!"

"I hope I may help you both," said Mrs. Maynes. "Norah was my daughter Lottie's favourite school-fellow. I am Mrs. Maynes."

"She has often spoken of you. May I tell you the treachery which has nearly separated us for ever?"

Inviting her guest to be seated, and despatching Lottie with directions for the preparation of a meal and a bed-room, Mrs. Maynes listened to the following:

"Norah and I have loved each other from childhood. Ours is but a distant cousinship; in fact no cousinship at all; but her mother treated me as a son, and gave her daughter to me on her death-bed. A year after, Captain Fitzgerald traded on the affection of his daughter, told her I was about to marry some one else, got her



engaged to this Mr. Brown, and I never should have heard a word till too late but for her little brother Terry, a boy of twelve. He walked nearly twenty miles to tell me what was happening—and what had been said of me; and I came off to England at once. Captain Fitzgerald is to have his base gambling debts paid the day my poor Norah is sacrificed! Oh, Mrs. Maynes, as you have a daughter of your own, whose happiness is dear to you, help me to regain my promised wife."

Tears were in Mrs. Maynes' eyes, and she held out both her hands.

"You may trust me—but you must leave all to me. Now make a hearty supper, and be thankful the snow-storm has driven you among friends."

Lottie pleaded in vain for any revelation of her mother's plans, and was almost as impatient as the Irish lover, when nothing transpired till two hours after breakfast. Mrs. Maynes had received a visitor privately, to whom she had sent a note early in the morning. She was closeted in the library for nearly an hour, and when she came to the dining-room where eager eyes were watching for her, she said:

"I have someone here who wishes to see you, Mr. O'Moore."

"Norah?" he cried, starting forward.

"No! Mr. Brown."

An angry exclamation escaped Brian.

"He is a good, true-hearted man, and more to be pitied than *you* are," said Mrs. Maynes, gravely; "go and see him."

The two men were a strange contrast. One tall, handsome, noble-looking, the other small, slight, and nervous in manner. He was a great man for all that, very frank and open, and his face was a study as he said:

"Sir, I did not know I had nearly robbed you of a treasure you can never prize too highly. We have both been cheated, but never by *her*. Norah is yours, and I am going back now to bring her to greater happiness than I could have given her."

A few hours later, happy, blushing Norah became Mrs. Maynes' grateful guest. Captain Fitzgerald disappeared ignominiously, and in a very little while Brian took his beautiful bride to Limerick, where Terry shared the honours of their simple home, idolised by the sister he had saved from misery.

It is a curious fact that Lottie was so impressed by the generosity and nobleness of Mr. Brown's character, she gave up mentioning "soap." Also, two years later she became Mrs. Brown and brought her good husband to live at Holmwood, which gradually resumed more than its former prosperous grandeur. Mrs. Maynes thoroughly admires her son-in-law, and the little Browns are charming children.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

## FRANZ LISZT.

A MAN like Franz Liszt, who has come before us at the age of seventy-five, clothed with honour and with the purpose of his life achieved, is a character we English delight in. It is, therefore, no idle curiosity which induces us to gather up all that can be told of him by those who have known him intimately, for it is by studying such a life that those who are starting on the race can also hope to win.

To begin at the beginning. Franz Liszt has both Magyar and German blood in his veins. His mother, Anna Lager, was born in Krems, a little distance from Vienna, while his father, Adam Liszt, was the descendant of an ancient and noble Hungarian family. Having no estate, he was compelled to earn an independence, and was fortunate enough to obtain the situation of steward in the palace of Prince Esterhazy, and in the village of Raiding, near Oedenburg, he married and settled in a modest little home.

Adam Liszt had a passionate love for music and art, which his daily occupations left him little time to indulge in. Yet every spare moment was used to such effect that he could play all stringed instruments, as well as the flute and pianoforte; and one or other of these he usually played at the services in the chapel attached to the palace.

Haydn was Kapellmeister to Prince Esterhazy and Hummel Concertmeister at the period of Liszt's stewardship, and between these three men there existed a great friendship. It was here also that he made the acquaintance of Cherubini and other famous masters.

What wonder that Adam Liszt recognised with intense joy the love of music in his little son Franz, who was born in the year of the comet 1811, in the month of October? The child was brought up in an atmosphere of harmony, and his easily excited imagination was fed and impressed by the home and church music, and by the wild, fantastic melodies of the Gipsies, who not infrequently rested in the village. The boy knew his notes before he had mastered the alphabet, and would steal away from his playmates to his father's pianoforte.

From the age of six he seemed to have neither life nor enjoyment out of his music, and applied himself to it with such passionate energy that his mother became alarmed for his health. He was found one day regarding a portrait of Beethoven, which hung on the wall of the living-room, and addressing it, said, with all the earnestness of a vow: "*One day I mean to be like you.*"

Speedily and with steady purpose he went forward, astounding

everyone by his manipulation of the piano, by his reading at sight and by his power of improvising.

He was only nine years old when he played at a public concert at Oedenburg, with such success that he was at once secured for a concert which was to be given in the Prince's Palace at Presburg. This concert was attended by a most musical and artistic audience, as well as by many Hungarian nobles, who were so struck and delighted with the boy's talent that they guaranteed him £60 a year for six years to enable him to continue his studies under the best masters.

It would have been difficult to find a happier boy than Franz Liszt when he heard of his good fortune. All he wanted was opportunity of study; for he never wavered in the purpose of his life; never lost confidence in his power to achieve it, with God's help; and never doubted his power to return in a measure the tenderness, care, and self-sacrifice of his parents.

This generosity of the Hungarian nobles brought about an entire change in the life of the Liszts. The boy must seek the best masters wherever they were to be found; and the father, therefore, resigned his appointment as steward, and broke up his little home, to enable him and his wife to accompany Franz.

So to Vienna they went and dwelt there two years, while Franz took lessons on the piano from Czerny, and in composition from Salieri and Randhartinger.

Two concerts were given in Vienna for the purpose of introducing the lad of fourteen to the people of this music-loving city. Beethoven, who rarely at this time appeared in public, was among the audience, and was so delighted with the boy's extraordinary talent that he went on to the platform, and, before the crowded assembly, took Franz in his arms and kissed him.

These concerts were a great success and provided Adam Liszt with the means to take Franz to Paris, and thus fulfil his heart's desire that his boy should enter the Conservatoire and complete his studies under Cherubini.

They came to Paris, but Cherubini would not relax the law of the Conservatoire, which was that no foreigner should be admitted.

"My father and I," writes the boy "besought very earnestly that the law for once might be set aside, but it was of no avail. I was miserable and not to be comforted; everything seemed lost to me, and I believed there was nowhere any hope for me." Fortunately he succeeded in securing for his teachers Paer and Raicha, with whom he studied composition, and so was able to make his way without the help of the Conservatoire.

The letters of introduction he carried from the Hungarian nobles opened the salons of the Parisian aristocracy to their protégé, and the Duchesse de Berry and the Duke of Orleans, afterwards Louis Philippe, took him specially under their protection. Le Petit Litz,



FRANZ LISZT.

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as he was called, was the hero of the day, the pet of the nobility, the artists and the learned ; in short, of all cultivated Paris.

Just as the press in Vienna, in Munich and in Stutgardt had lauded him, so now did the Paris journals, especially after his appearing at a concert in 1824 at the Italian Opera. He was declared to be the "first pianoforte player in Europe, the child beyond compare, whose bewitching elegance, charm of mind and manner, kind heart and aristocratic bearing had taken captive the hearts of all." Soon Le Petit Litz became known as a composer ; and his opera in one act called "*La Sancho ; or, The Castle of Love*," was brought out at the Académie Royale, in October, 1825, amid such a storm of applause that the actor who played the chief character, when called before the curtain, took up the fourteen-year-old composer in his arms and thus presented him to the enthusiastic audience.\*

During the next two years he made artistic tours in Switzerland and in the French Provinces ; he also came twice to England in 1824 and 1825, accompanied by Erard. George IV. showed him much kindness during these visits.

In May and June, 1827, he played at the Philharmonic concerts in London. His reception was not so enthusiastic as on previous occasions, and his agent suffered a loss, which Liszt, with his usual generosity, made good.

It was just after this visit that he went to Boulogne, accompanied by his father, to take sea baths and to get some little rest. While there, Adam Liszt died suddenly. Overwhelmed with sorrow as Franz was, he did not forget that upon him now lay the responsibility of providing for his mother, who had stayed in Austria while he and his father had been travelling from place to place. So he sent for her at once to Paris, where, at the expense of his ambition, he supported her in comfort by giving pianoforte lessons.

He rarely now appeared in public, and gave himself up to morbid sensitiveness. From this unhealthy state he was suddenly and thoroughly roused by his first love-dream. He fell in love with Caroline, Countess St. Erig, the daughter of the Minister of the Interior. But notwithstanding that the love was mutual, she could not be his wife, as her father had already promised her in marriage.

Again, as in the days of sorrow after his father's death, he withdrew from the world and would have entered a monastery but for the pleading of his mother, to whom he was ever tender and obedient.

It was the July revolution that roused him and once more set him free to work and mix again in society, when he became acquainted with Berlioz and Chopin, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, and Georges Sand. His ambition also was most thoroughly roused by the appearance in Paris of Paganini, whose power over the violin he desired to equal, nay surpass, on the pianoforte.

\* This, the only opera of Liszt, was burnt in the fire which occurred in the Opera Library.

Franz Liszt, in speaking of Paganini, says that his playing made him understand what the true mission of a musician should be, viz.—not to use his art for egotistical profit and advantage, but on the contrary to make it a power of sympathy, uniting and binding the hearts of men together, to use it as a means of inspiring in them the love of the beautiful, the noble, and the holy.

In quiet and incessant work the time went by until, in 1834, he made the acquaintance of the Countess d'Agoult, better known by the name of Daniel Stern. This lady, who died in 1876, was the mother of his three children, one of whom is the widow of Richard Wagner. It was in this year, 1834, that he again appeared at concerts, and made good his title to the first rank of pianists.

"It is difficult," says La Mara, "to talk of Liszt's playing to those who have never heard him. His playing is a revelation." "The instrument glows and sparkles under his hands," says Schumann. And Mendelssohn, writing of him, declares: "I have never seen a musician like Liszt, in whom feeling and sentiment seem to run to the fingertips and pour out in an unchecked stream." In Liszt's own words: "My pianoforte is myself, my speech, my life."

After this year of success in Paris, 1834, he lived in retirement at Geneva for two or three years, until he was mastered by the desire of once again living a public life. From 1839 to 1847 he travelled about from place to place, triumph and honour following ever at his heels. He was decked with orders and titles by pope and princes, such enthusiasm as he excited had never been heard of. Suddenly, in the midst of all this, he became weary of triumphs; he seemed impressed with the vanity of it all, and longed for a quiet home; and, to the astonishment of everyone, he settled down in the little town of Weimar in 1849, as conductor of the Court Theatre. Here he became the universal attraction, not only of Germany, but of all countries. When Liszt settled in Weimar it was with the purpose of bringing before the public such works as had in themselves great merit, but which had had no opportunity of being produced on any stage. Among these were "*Lohengrin*," "*Tannhäuser*," "*Manfred*," and "*Benvenuto Cellini*."

Wagner in his time of sickness, misery and despair owed much to the kindness and appreciation of Liszt. He himself says: "When in Paris, sick and ill, my eye fell on "*Lohengrin*," I felt a sort of compassion that this music should never appear from off the death-pale paper; so I wrote two words to Liszt, whose answer was that preparations were being made to produce it on the largest scale that the limited means of Weimar would allow." Again he relates how "while resting in Thuringia for a few days, uncertain whether I must fly from Germany, I saw Liszt conducting a rehearsal of my "*Tannhäuser*," and was astonished at recognising my second self in the achievement. What I had felt in inventing this music, he felt in performing it. What I wanted to express in writing it down, he expressed in making it sound. Strange

to say, through the love of this rarest friend, I gained, at the moment of becoming homeless, a real home for my art, which I had hitherto longed for and sought for always in the wrong place."

Liszt dwelt in Weimar until 1859, when, owing to some opposition to the production of an opera, he resigned his appointment and went on a long visit to his mother, who still lived in Paris. He went to Rome in 1861 and, four years later received the title of Abbé, became a monk of the Franciscan Order, and dwelt for a whole year in the Vatican. Pio Nono had a great admiration for him, calling him his son, his Palestrina.

In 1869 Liszt returned to Germany, and paid long yearly visits to Weimar. The Grand Duke presented him with a house beautifully situated in the midst of the park, and here, says Amy Fay, "he lives elegantly and free of expense, whenever he chooses to come to it. One of the rooms in this house has been furnished and put in order by the Grand Duchess herself. All Weimar adores him. When he walks out he bows to everybody just like a king. No wonder that he is loved and honoured, for never has man done so much to help young artists. His heart and purse have been ever open to them, his time and experience always at their disposal. Since 1847 his life has been exclusively consecrated to the benefit of others, to artistic undertakings, and to charitable objects." All who are interested in this great master should read La Mara's "*Musikalische Studienköpfe*" and Amy Fay's "*Music Study in Germany*." Her pictures of Liszt and his every-day life in Weimar are most vivid and fascinating.

Our enthusiasm at his reappearance, after an absence of nearly half a century, has been a marvellous testimony to the power that must have shone out in his early life; the earnestness and quiet strength of his purpose: influences that seem to have followed him even in his retirement. From the Queen, who commanded his attendance at Windsor Castle and hastened to do him honour, down to the humblest of her artistic subjects, there has been the desire to express admiration for a life nobly lived, a purpose perfectly fulfilled. Who that heard him quietly improvising at the rehearsal of St. Elizabeth will ever forget the thrill with which he listened to those first notes struck by the hand that in England had been silent for more than half a lifetime? Or the wave of emotion that swept over him on the following night, as Liszt's appearance was greeted over and over again by storms and tempests of applause? Few people living can compare the Liszt of fifty years ago with the Liszt of to-day as he has stood before us: but the face with age can only have gained an added charm: the charm of a heart and mind at rest after its work: the quiet serenity of the evening of a life spent in artistic labours and in doing good to his fellow men.

E BREWER.

## THE MAJOR.

By C. HADDON CHAMBERS.

MAJOR DYMPLÉ is an old traveller. As he has visited almost every country in the known world, he has plenty of experiences to relate; and, what is more uncommon, he possesses the knack of relating them well. Get the Major in a good humour—and it is not difficult to do so if you are fortunate enough to dine with him—and you may depend upon an interesting story.

I had been dining with Major Dymplé at the club one evening, and we had been talking philosophically of ocean voyages and “board-ship” life. I felt certain that the subject would recall to the Major’s memory an interesting experience, and I was not disappointed. With the cigars came the following singular story, which I must take the liberty of relating in my own way; filling in, for the reader’s satisfaction, many details, such as I imagine them to have been, and which my friend’s susceptibilities prompted him to omit.

In 1880 the Major found himself in Australia. He had been away from home for three years, during which he had “done” the two Americas, India, China, Japan, and the far East generally. Cape Colony, the East and West coasts, Egypt, Arabia and the Holy Land he had done in former times; while he could almost count his scampers over the Continent by dozens. Since landing in Australia, too, he had spent four months in cruising among the islands of the South Pacific.

It is no wonder, then, that when he came to himself in Melbourne in 1880, the Major began to long for home and rest. He was sated with travel. He reflected, with shame, that he knew many countries more intimately than his own. He knew the Mall, Whitehall, Aldershot, Wimbledon, Brighton, Goodwood, and a few other places, but he had never been up the Grampian Hills or down a Lancashire coal mine; to the Lakes of Killarney or the Giant’s Causeway in the sister isle. The Major acknowledged to himself that it was a man’s duty to see his own country before wandering about other people’s, and he felt remorseful.

Then came the mournful thought that he was no longer twenty-five, but within a very few years of twice that age. Great heavens! In a little over twenty years more he would have lived the allotted span, and he was still unmarried—no provision made for the respectable domestic comforts old age demands. He had his income of fourteen hundred a-year—sufficient for all natural comforts—but age without companionship would be unbearable. He looked in the mirror, and was startled at the quantity of grey hair that was to be seen among the brown. Had he remained at home, he thought

bitterly, he would have had plenty of kind friends to tell him how grey he was getting. In short, being for the first time in his life terribly home-sick—a moral ailment which might frequently be traced to physical causes—the Major resolved to arise and depart.

No sooner was the resolution taken than my friend, a man of action and impulse, began to make it good. A glance at the morning paper told him that the fates were propitious. In two days the R.M.S. *Iberia* would sail for London, via the Suez Canal. In half-an-hour the Major was at the agent's office, looking over a plan of the *Iberia's* saloon. With the discretion of an old traveller he selected the most comfortable and the best situated of the vacant state rooms; then he paid the fare, received his ticket, drove back to his hotel, and began to pack up his wisely limited luggage. A visit to the bank, hurried calls upon two or three of the few friends he had made, messages of regret to those he was unable to see, and then the Major shook Australian dust from his feet, and rowed off to the *Iberia*. When the big ship steamed through Port Phillip Heads our friend was as comfortably settled on board as though he had lived there all his life.

During the first few days Major Dymple kept himself well in reserve. He knew too well the folly of making sudden friendships, especially on board ship, where, if a little patience and observation is exercised, the true characters of one's fellow passengers will very soon be disclosed. The passenger-ship is a splendid field for the student of human nature.

Major Dymple was less a student of human nature than a student of self-comfort. The latter it was his practice to study with considerable earnestness; and, accordingly, he refrained from getting mixed up too intimately with people who upon further acquaintance might prove to be objectionable. As a matter of policy he made himself agreeable to the officers, and he seized an early opportunity of cracking a bottle of dry Monopole with the captain.

Several days passed. The usual call was made at Adelaide, and a scamper on shore was afforded. Then the *Iberia* steamed along the great Australian bight in beautiful weather, rounded the usually turbulent "Leeuwin" in a calm—the stormy cape was caught asleep for once—and began to plough her way N.N.W. across the placid breast of the Indian ocean.

It was not till then that the cautious Major permitted himself to be on friendly terms with any of the passengers. Three men in the saloon he found to be very decent fellows. They were gentlemen, and they played cards—two first-rate recommendations. Among the ladies there was one only who attracted our traveller's attention: a widow, blonde, beautiful and clever, and certainly not more than thirty.

Now the Major was very susceptible to female loveliness, especially when it was accompanied by wit. It was accident and the wandering



life he had led, and not want of inclination, that accounted for his not having been permanently caught in the silken toils of the gentle sex years ago.

It must not be imagined for one moment that his celibacy was the consequence of an unattractive appearance. So far from that being the case the Major was generally considered a handsome man. A tall, manly figure, with broad shoulders, deep chest, and straight, muscular limbs; a well-set head, clothed with thick brown hair besprinkled with grey; a face well shaped and closely shaven, with fine brown eyes, and clear-cut aquiline features; a distinguished bearing, courtly manners, and a smile which disclosed white, even teeth, all contributed to a personality which excited admiration in women and envy in men. Years have the same improving effect upon some men as upon wine. The Major was one of those men. He was much better looking at forty-five than he had been in his twenties.

Of all the men on board who were attentive to Mrs. Flemington: and they included the captain, the officers, and all the grass-widowers and unmarried men in the saloon: the Major was the least demonstrative and the most successful. He sat opposite to her at table, furtively and admiringly watching the play of her mobile features, and the changing lights in her big grey-blue eyes. He sat near and chatted with her on deck, enjoying the brightness of her wit and the keenness of her intelligence; he fetched books for her from the library, frequently choosing them himself; he turned over her music at the piano, and occasionally—having a light, easy, baritone voice and a good ear—sang duets with her. He did all these things in a quiet, unostentatious manner: and in the same quiet, unostentatious manner he sank deeply in love with the charming widow.

Perhaps Mrs. Flemington was also in love, but it was not quite certain. Although she had plenty of dignity: with the power, too, of exercising it very sharply when occasion required (as more than one presumptuous wight on board could ruefully testify) she unbent to the handsome Major, and it was very apparent that she enjoyed his society. Perhaps, having already experienced one courtship, she endeavoured to compare her feelings then and now, and was unable to determine their relative depth and value. Perhaps, woman-like, she was merely enjoying the companionship of the most agreeable man on board, without troubling to analyse her feelings, or give the matter any serious thought at all.

Not so the Major. He was playing Napoleon in the smoking-room one night, when he observed that he had allowed one of his opponents to go three when he had a certain four in his own hand. Such an absurd thing had never happened to him before. "What could I have been thinking of?" he mused, abstractedly shuffling the cards. The answer came readily. "Of Mrs. Flemington." "Then," reasoned the Major very properly, "if I, a devoted card-player, was

thinking of Mrs. Flemington instead of the game, I must surely be in love."

Such a serious discovery justified the Major in complaining of headache, and retiring from the card-table to the saloon deck. Walking slowly up and down, he proceeded to think the matter out. Now that he had come to himself, as it were, he knew, he felt, that he was in love. A troubled but not unpleasant feeling in the neighbourhood of his heart told him that it was but too true.

He had experienced the same feeling several times before, but in a much milder degree. On such occasions he had fought with and conquered it, or taken refuge in flight. But he was no longer young and had less fight in him, and flight was impossible. Nor, to tell the truth, had he a particular inclination for either. Why should he? Had he not come to the conclusion in Melbourne that it was time he settled down in life? Was he not too old to wander about the world unloved and uncared for? To settle down with, and be loved and cared for by Mrs. Flemington was a destiny to be desired. True there was a slight disparity in their ages, but a man is as old as he feels, and a woman is as old as she looks. The Major felt thirty-five, and Mrs. Flemington looked a young thirty—a very suitable difference indeed! They had both travelled, and were a man and woman of the world—another circumstance to be reckoned among the *pros*. A woman of experience and worldly wisdom, the Major concluded, would be a more congenial companion for him than a modern society young lady.

With his usual courage and promptitude Major Dymple decided to seize the first favourable opportunity of proposing to Mrs. Flemington: reserving to himself, however, the right of first discreetly questioning her aunt—a genial, garrulous old lady who accompanied her—as to their social position.

"Of course I know nothing of her," he murmured to himself: "and," his sense of justice obliged him to add, "she knows nothing of me. She may be penniless, but, hang it! I have enough for two moderate people."

With which generous thought he retired to bed.

The next afternoon the Major secured a quiet *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Flemington's aunt. It required very little diplomacy or tact to elicit the desired information, for the old lady, besides her garrulity, was very ingenuous, and great on family history. Had it been necessary, the interested inquirer might have heard the story of the Lincolnshire house of Dornoccar, of which Mrs. Flemington was a daughter, from the days of Rufus. Sufficient, however, that the family was old, reputable, and proud, though in the latter days comparatively poor, in consequence, of course, of an ancestor's unswerving and unselfish allegiance to the first Charles. Further, the Major learned that the late lamented Flemington had been a barrister. He had settled in Queensland for the sake of his health, which was very delicate, and

there had left his wife a widow two years since. All this, to which should be added the intimation that Mrs. Flemington had an income quite sufficient for her needs, was eminently satisfactory.

The Major was constrained to unbosom himself at once. He gave a faithful account of his circumstances, and told of his attachment. The old lady betrayed no surprise. She had seen the way the wind was blowing for some days, and she frankly confessed that she had formed a good opinion of the Major, which she believed her niece shared. But she deprecated haste. Mrs. Flemington was entirely her own mistress, and the Major could speak to her, if he liked, of course; but the old lady thought it would be proper and advisable to wait until the friendship had ripened; at least until they reached England and knew more of each other.

The Major admitted that there was reason in what the old lady said, but he did not pledge himself to follow her advice. On the contrary he secretly resolved to strike while the iron was hot. He was not the only suitor Mrs. Flemington had on board. The Major saw a probable rival, and a formidable one, in a certain Mr. Sparkle, one of the card players, young, handsome, and reported to be wealthy. Mr. Sparkle was a buoyant, amusing fellow, and the Major remembered with a pang of anxiety that the fair widow always had a hearty laugh for his nonsense and buffoonery. No! there was certainly no time to be lost.

The Major could find no opportunity of carrying out his intention that day, but he determined to be more successful on the next, even if he had to descend to the conventional "Can you spare me a few moments' private conversation?" to secure a *tête-à-tête*. Later in the evening he tried to divert himself at cards with Sparkle and the rest, and in a couple of hours his abstraction cost him ten guineas.

At midnight he retired, leaving his companions, who seemed bent on making a night of it, still playing.

The Major had slept about two hours, and was in the most interesting part of a beautiful dream, in which Mrs. Flemington figured as heroine, when he was awakened by a noise in the cabin. It was Sparkle and one of his companions, both in a somewhat elevated condition.

"Are you awake, Major?" whispered Sparkle.

"No, I'm not," grunted our hero.

"We have run short of liquor—want a night-cap before turning in—thought you might have some."

"Flask in lower bunk," answered the Major from under the bed-clothes.

"Thanks, old fellow."

In a hazy sort of way the Major thought it was like their confounded impertinence to come into his cabin in the middle of the night; but before he had time to get angry he fell asleep again.

"Here it is!" announced Sparkle, after groping about the lower bunk for a minute.

"Out with it," answered his companion. "Got a glass?"

"No. Sure to be one here somewhere. Let's see. Ah, here we are. Hullo! it's full of water."

"Chuck it out of the port-hole."

It being a terribly hot night, the Major was sleeping with the port-hole open. Leaning over the bunk, and being careful not to disturb the sleeper, Mr. Sparkle threw the contents of the tumbler into the Indian Ocean.

Then the two gentlemen, with ludicrous solemnity, drank the Major's health.

"Good fellow, the Major," remarked Sparkle, gratefully: and the pair stumbled out of the cabin, and made for their respective quarters.

The Major was an early riser, and when at nine the next morning he had not left his cabin his steward ventured to knock at the door.

There was no reply, so the steward rapped a little louder.

"What is it?" asked a muffled voice.

"Nine o'clock, sir."

"All right."

But when another hour passed, without the Major appearing, the steward suspected that it was not all right. He knocked again.

"Well!"

"Shall I bring you some breakfast, sir?"

"No."

"Are you unwell, sir?"

"Yes," after a pause.

"Shall I send the doctor to you, sir?"

"No." Then while the steward hesitated, the voice added, with some asperity: "Go away."

Six bells had struck. It was past ten, and the Major had not yet been seen on deck. This was so unlike him that Mrs. Flemington's pretty head was full of perplexity.

"Have you seen Major Dymple?" she asked of Mr. Sparkle, who had taken advantage of the absence of his rival to ensconce himself at her side.

"No, I've not."

"Have you made any enquiries about him?"

"Well, no. We're very good friends, but I must confess to being a little selfish, and I have felt his absence this morning to be rather an advantage."

"I'm sure that Major Dymple would never feel your absence to be an advantage," said Mrs. Flemington, coolly.

Mr. Sparkle winced. "Shall I look him up?" he asked, hastily.

"If you wish," replied the widow, indifferently.

"No, it's if *you* wish."

"When I have a message to send I shall have no difficulty in finding a messenger." And Mrs. Flemington opened her book, and appeared to lose the knowledge of Mr. Sparkle's existence.

Another knock, and a loud one, at the Major's door.

"Who is it?"

"Your own Sparkle. May he enter?"

"No."

"Oh, hang it!" muttered the young gentleman. "That's the second knock in the eye I've had to-day. I must pay him out for that. Are you feeling seedy, Major?"

"Very."

"You should be careful of yourself." The voice, if not the words, hinted at the Major's grey hairs. "You shouldn't have slept with the port-hole open last night. Have you caught cold?"

"Yes."

"That's bad. You really must take more care of yourself. Shall you be on deck presently?"

"No."

"So bad as that? Two or three people have been enquiring after you."

"Who?" asked the Major, with ill-concealed eagerness.

"Well, let me see now," answered the malicious Sparkle, thoughtfully. "The second officer—he asked; so did Blake; and, yes, so did Johnstone."

The Major groaned inwardly, and turning his face to the wall, or rather to the ship's side, he spoke no more.

Mr. Sparkle returned on deck, and found Mrs. Flemington where he had left her. Taking a seat by her side, he looked grave.

"I'm afraid the Major's in a bad way," he said.

"What is the matter with him?" asked the widow, hastily.

"I can scarcely say. You see, he's very reckless—slept with his port-hole open last night, and in consequence has caught a severe cold. Very dangerous thing, a cold! I didn't see him, but we had a long conversation through the door."

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Flemington.

"Well, I should have said that *I* had the conversation. He said nothing but 'yes' once or twice, and 'no' several times. Do you know, I fear the Major has not a very even temper."

"I have not remarked it," said Mrs. Flemington. "But I remember now that Major Dymple confided to me one day that the only being able to ruffle his temper is a bore; and do you know, Mr. Sparkle, I quite sympathise with him." Whereupon Mrs. Flemington returned to her book.

The day passed without the Major leaving his cabin. Some luncheon and dinner was brought him by the steward, but sent away barely touched. On the following morning, as he still did not appear,



the doctor was sent to him. The visit lasted for a few minutes only. When Mrs. Flemington met the doctor on deck afterwards she anxiously enquired after the patient.

"Is the Major better, doctor?"

"There is no change in his condition."

"Is it a dangerous illness?"

"Oh no! not at all. It is an inconvenient and unpleasant attack, but it is neither dangerous nor, fortunately, contagious."

"Then Major Dymple will be on deck again soon?"

"I fear not," replied the doctor. "In fact I don't think we will see much of him for the rest of the voyage."

Mrs. Flemington looked very disappointed.

"Is Major Dymple subject to these attacks?" asked her aunt, who had just joined them.

"I don't think he has ever had one before," replied the doctor.

"And is he suffering?" asked the widow, tenderly.

"Acutely; but not physically. His sufferings are of the mind." And to avoid further questioning the doctor beat a retreat.

"This sudden indisposition of the Major's is very singular," remarked the old lady. "Perhaps I ought to tell you, my dear, that Major Dymple confided to me his intention of proposing to you. I advised him not to be too hasty; to wait until you had seen more of each other. He has evidently not spoken to you on the subject, or you would have told me."

"No, he has not," replied Mrs. Flemington, with a heightened colour.

"I think you like him," said the old lady, who was at heart a match-maker.

"I like him very much," answered her niece, simply.

Mrs. Flemington spent a very dull day. Sparkle devoted himself to her, but failed to enliven her. His wittiest sallies fell dismally flat; his most ludicrous absurdities were received with sadness. In the evening, however, he was more successful. As they sat on deck together at about half past ten Mr. Sparkle joked and Mrs. Flemington laughed. Suddenly they saw a tall and unmistakable figure, wrapped in a long overcoat. The widow involuntarily rose to her feet.

"Is that you, Major Dymple?"

There was no reply. The figure quickly disappeared.

"Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!" quoted Sparkle.

Mrs. Flemington retired to her cabin in anger and mortification, having made up her mind that the Major's illness was a pretence, and that his object was to avoid her.

An hour later the Major again appeared on deck, and looked cautiously around. He could bear the confinement of his cabin no longer. He wanted fresh air and exercise. As the saloon deck

was now deserted, he paced quickly up and down. His thoughts were very bitter. He had heard Mrs. Flemington laughing—laughing gaily, while she knew that he was ill. He used to enjoy her merriment; but the silvery peals he had just heard stabbed him to the soul, for they were occasioned by the witticisms of his rival: and, torturing thought! they were possibly at his expense.

Pausing in his walk the Major leaned over the stern, and gazed at the agitated water beneath. One little slip—a quiet vault over the taffrail, and in a very few minutes he would be miles astern, floating alone on the great wilderness of water, to sink at last, murmuring the name of one fair, false woman, to a lonely resting-place in the cold, hungry deep. Or, less poetic thought, he might be caught in the arms of the propeller, and crushed out of existence in its revolvings. But in either case the effect would be the same: Mrs. Flemington would be doomed to a life-long remorse.

Satisfied with the pleasant fancy, the Major resumed his walk, and in a few moments he was, with singular inconsistency, mentally consigning his deadliest enemy, Mr. Sparkle, to the happy fate he had sketched out for himself.

The Major was not the only restless soul abroad that night. He suddenly discovered that there was a man pacing the second saloon deck, whom, in his preoccupation, he had not hitherto observed. Occasionally they met in their walk at the railing which divided the two decks, and the Major became seized with a longing to address his fellow watcher. Must there not be a bond of sympathy between them, that they two, of all the passengers, should seek that quiet hour for solitude and reflection? Our hero at that moment would have fled upon the approach of the Captain, Mrs. Flemington, Mr. Sparkle, or any of his friends, but he would have gladly chatted with the cook, or the baker, or anyone he had not met before. His forty-eight hours' confinement made him long for companionship, and so he was drawn toward this stranger of the second saloon. Accordingly he hazarded "It's a beautiful night" when they next met at the railing.

The stranger responded with alacrity. He was a very small and very attenuated man, with a pale, lean face, straight black hair, an aggressive nose, and bright dark eyes which suggested a restless, sanguine spirit too big for the weak little body.

"It is indeed a beautiful night, sir. The man who elects to stew in a hot, stuffy cabin on such a night is wanting in taste and poetic feeling."

Without pausing to consider to what extent he merited this indirect compliment, the Major accepted it graciously.

"I quite agree with you, sir," he said. "Midnight on the ocean is a seductive, dreamy hour."

"It is certainly the hour for the dreamer," replied the stranger, looking up at the stars—"and I am a dreamer. Physical insignificance, a limited education, lack of golden opportunity, and a con-

dition in life inexorably glued to the commonplace—in short, fate has shut me out from the possibility of soaring. But I have my dreams. I encourage and foster them ; I steal away by myself and gloat over them, and am happy. Now I have the might and courage of Achilles ; in an hour I have woven for myself as adventurous a career as that of Ulysses. At one time I am a second Shakespeare ; at another the mantle of Charles Dickens has fallen upon me. I have been all things — poet, priest, politician, philosopher, scientist, soldier, navigator and king ; and as each and all I have been pre-eminent. I have dwelt in yon golden planets, and I have penetrated the most hidden depths of this mighty ocean. I have tracked the tiger through the jungle to his lair ; and in the desert I have taken the lion by the beard and slain him. I have—well, I'm afraid I have succeeded in boring you."

"Not at all," answered the Major ; "on the contrary, I am deeply interested. But I confess to being surprised that a man of your very evident abilities should confine himself to dreaming. Small stature cannot be a good excuse for inaction when we remember that many of the greatest men that ever lived were of small, and even weakly frames. How often has it been proved that a great spirit may conquer any physical disability. Remember that 'the mind's the standard of the man,' and ——"

"Stay, sir," interrupted the little man. "Do not condemn one without a fair hearing. I told you just now that my life is trammelled by a multitude of commonplaces. Let me give you a few examples. Commonplace number one—my name is John Jobson."

"And a very good name too," interjected the Major.

"Your politeness does you honour," replied Mr. Jobson, smiling. "Granted then, for the sake of argument only, that John Jobson is a euphonious cognomen. Let us proceed. Commonplace number two, I am, and always have been, poor. Commonplace number three, I am a dentist !"

The Major started as though Mr. Jobson had discharged a pistol in his face. Had the gods offered to grant him the realisation of one wish, he would have said "send me a dentist." And this weird little man seemed to have dropped from the skies to his deliverance. Then the Major's ecstasy became chilled by the reflection that a dentist in his consulting room and workshop, and the same individual on board ship were two very different things. Mr. Jobson might object to practising under the circumstances : or, very probably, he had not the necessary paraphernalia with him.

"You appear surprised," remarked Mr. Jobson. "Am I to infer that I have met an unfortunate brother professional ?"

"You have met an unfortunate," replied the Major, "but not a brother professional. Have you not noticed that I keep this wrap over my mouth, and that my speech is terribly imperfect. Never did a man stand in more urgent need of your skill than I."

"What is the trouble?" asked Mr. Jobson, suddenly becoming as practical as he had hitherto been the reverse. "Allow me to see for myself."

Diving under the railing, Mr. Jobson led his patient to the nearest light. The tall man stooping, with distended jaws, while the little man, with hat thrown back, peered earnestly into his mouth, was a humorous spectacle, and it was well for the Major's tender sensibilities that they were unobserved.

"Magnificent teeth, those you have," remarked Mr. Jobson, admiringly; "but you've lost three in the top row, and almost full in front. What a difference it must make to your appearance?"

"I should rather think it did," said the Major, with considerable emphasis.

"Bar accidents, your teeth will live longer than you. How could you have lost the missing ones."

"Those provided by nature were kicked out at football over twenty years ago," replied the Major; "the admirable substitutes furnished by your useful profession are now at the bottom of the ocean."

"At the bottom of the ocean!" echoed Mr. Jobson, in amazement.

"Exactly. Perhaps the plate has gone to supply a deficiency in the mouth of some aged shark. This is how it happened. Two half tipsy fellows came into my cabin in the middle of the night in search of drink. I directed them to a flask of whiskey which was in the lower bunk, and fell asleep again, but I have an indistinct recollection of one of them leaning over me to empty something through the port-hole. In the morning, the tumbler of scented water which had contained my teeth was empty. Of course, under the circumstances I could not appear among the passengers again, and I have had it given out that I am indisposed. Mr. Jobson, you are the only man on board who can do anything for me. Believe me the happiness of at least one other besides myself depends upon you."

"The difficulty would be to find a workshop," said Mr. Jobson, thoughtfully; "but perhaps the doctor would assist us in that."

"The doctor will place every facility at your disposal, I am sure," replied the Major, eagerly. "He is in my confidence."

"Then you may look upon the thing as done, as, fortunately, I have everything necessary in a portmanteau in my cabin. I will match your teeth in the morning early, and by noon on the following day you will be yourself again."

"How shall I ever reward you?" cried the Major, grasping the little man's hand in his gratitude. "You shall name your own fee, besides having made a staunch friend for life."

"My fee will be the usual one," replied Mr. Jobson, calmly. "But that necessity forbids it, I should make no charge at all, for yours is the only case I have met in my homely profession in which there has been a spice of novelty and interest. But perhaps I may one day ask a favour of you. I am writing a book: you may be kind

enough when it is completed to permit its publication under your patronage."

The Major declared that he would be only too delighted, and he further pledged himself to take one hundred copies of the work.

"I know it's very presumptuous of me," Sparkle was saying to Mrs Flemington two days after the events recorded; "but for the life of me I can't help it. I love you, upon my honour I do, most dearly."

"I don't doubt your word, Mr. Sparkle," answered the widow, calmly.

"I've been trying to pluck up courage to speak to you for days."

"Just four days?" suggested the lady, smiling.

"Well about that time"—and the young man changed colour—"but you're not listening seriously to me. You little know ——"

Mr. Sparkle stopped abruptly. His hated and powerful rival approached, erect and dignified, along the deck. The Major paused in front of them, smiling the well-known beautiful smile, and disclosing the well-known beautiful teeth.

"How do you do, Mrs. Flemington? Mr. Sparkle how are you?"

Sparkle rose from his seat and offered his hand. The Major favoured him with a hearty, revengeful grip which made his fingers tingle for an hour afterwards, and coolly sank into the vacant chair. Swallowing his rage, Mr. Sparkle retired. Before the night closed, Major Dymple had vowed away his bachelorship, and Mrs. Flemington her widowhood.

In the course of time Mr. Jobson's book was given to the world. It consisted of a number of poems under the title of "Dreams: by a Dreamer," and it was inscribed with the name of Major Dymple. Copies are now very scarce.





## A BROWN STUDY.

LET them sing of their primrose and cowslip,  
 Their daffodil-gold-coloured hair,  
 Their blue-bells, blue eyes, and white violets,  
 All the pale dreamy things they find fair ;  
 Give me stir of brown leaves in the sunshine,  
 The whir of brown wings in the beet,  
 The rush of brown hares through the stubble,  
 And the light in brown eyes of my sweet !

Gold hair ? Well—I never could love it,  
 Yet gold, I suppose, has its worth ;  
 The head that I love is as dusky  
 As the breast of our mother, the earth.  
 With a gleam like the shine of wet sea-weed,  
 Round pools that the tide has left clear,  
 And warm, like the breast of a linnet,  
 And as brown, is the hair of my dear.

From edge of the cliff we look downwards  
 On the shore, and the bay, and the town,  
 And brown is the short turf we lean on,  
 The fishing-boats' sails are all brown :  
 The sky may be blue—that's the background,  
 But the picture itself, to be fair—  
 However it's shaded and varied—  
 Should be brown as the dress that you wear !

A lark bursts to sudden-sweet singing—  
 That tuft of brown grass is his home—  
 And now, a brown speck, he is rising  
 Against the clear windy sky-dome ;  
 And he sings—How I know ? Love instructs me  
 To know all his notes, what they mean—  
 That it isn't the colour I care for  
 But yourself—O my gipsy, my Queen.

Ah ! the lark knows my heart—I his language :  
 It's my heart he sings out to the skies ;  
 It is *you* that I love, and what matter  
 The colour of hair or of eyes ?  
 No doubt I should love you as dearly  
 Were your hair like an apricot's down ;  
 And your eyes like the grey of the morning—  
 But I'm glad, all the same, that they're brown !

E. NESBIT.





M. L. GOW.

A WITCH'S BREW.

J. SWAIN.

M. L. GOW.